

First Session – Forty-Third Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Third Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALTOMARE, Nello, Hon.	Transcona	NDP
ASAGWARA, Uzoma, Hon.	Union Station	NDP
BALCAEN, Wayne	Brandon West	PC
BEREZA, Jeff	Portage la Prairie	PC
BLASHKO, Tyler	Lagimodière	NDP
BRAR, Diljeet	Burrows	NDP
BUSHIE, Ian, Hon.	Keewatinook	NDP
BYRAM, Jodie	Agassiz	PC
CABLE, Renée, Hon.	Southdale	NDP
CHEN, Jennifer	Fort Richmond	NDP
COOK, Kathleen	Roblin	PC
CROSS, Billie	Seine River	NDP
DELA CRUZ, Jelynn	Radisson	NDP
DEVGAN, JD	McPhillips	NDP
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FONTAINE, Nahanni, Hon.	St. Johns	NDP
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	PC
GUENTER, Josh	Borderland	PC
HIEBERT, Carrie	Morden-Winkler	PC
JACKSON, Grant	Spruce Woods	PC
JOHNSON, Derek	Interlake-Gimli	PC
KENNEDY, Nellie	Assiniboia	NDP
KHAN, Obby	Fort Whyte	PC
KINEW, Wab, Hon.	Fort Rouge	NDP
KING, Trevor	Lakeside	PC
KOSTYSHYN, Ron, Hon.	Dauphin	NDP
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	PC
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Tyndall Park	Lib.
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas-Kameesak	NDP
LINDSEY, Tom, Hon.	Flin Flon	NDP
LOISELLE, Robert	St. Boniface	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Malaya, Hon.	Notre Dame	NDP
MOROZ, Mike	River Heights	NDP
MOSES, Jamie, Hon.	St. Vital	NDP
MOYES, Mike	Riel	NDP
NARTH, Konrad	La Vérendrye	PC
NAYLOR, Lisa, Hon.	Wolseley	NDP
NESBITT, Greg	Riding Mountain	PC
OXENHAM, Logan	Kirkfield Park	NDP
PANKRATZ, David	Waverley	NDP
PERCHOTTE, Richard	Selkirk	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Turtle Mountain	PC
REDHEAD, Eric	Thompson	NDP
SALA, Adrien, Hon.	St. James	NDP
SANDHU, Mintu	The Maples	NDP
SCHMIDT, Tracy, Hon.	Rossmere	NDP
SCHOTT, Rachelle	Kildonan-River East	NDP
SCHULER, Ron	Springfield-Ritchot	PC
SIMARD, Glen, Hon.	Brandon East	NDP
SMITH, Bernadette, Hon.	Point Douglas	NDP
STEFANSON, Heather	Tuxedo	PC
STONE, Lauren	Midland	PC
WASYLIW, Mark	Fort Garry	NDP
WHARTON, Jeff	Red River North	PC
WIEBE, Matt, Hon.	Concordia	NDP
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, March 20, 2024

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

The Speaker: O Eternal and Almighty God, from Whom all power and wisdom come, we are assembled here before Thee to frame such laws as may tend to the welfare and prosperity of our province. Grant, O merciful God, we pray Thee, that we may desire only that which is in accordance with Thy will, that we may seek it with wisdom and know it with certainty and accomplish it perfectly for the glory and honour of Thy name and the welfare of all our people. Amen.

We acknowledge we are gathered on Treaty 1 territory and that Manitoba is located on the treaty territories and ancestral lands of the Anishinaabeg, Anishinewuk, Dakota Oyate, Denesuline, Nehethowuk nations. We acknowledge Manitoba is located on the Homeland of the Red River Métis. We acknowledge northern Manitoba includes lands that were and are the ancestral lands of the Inuit. We respect the spirit and intent of treaties and treaty making and remain committed to working in partnership with First Nations, Inuit and Métis people in the spirit of truth, reconciliation and collaboration.

Please be seated.

MATTER OF PRIVILEGE

(Continued)

The Speaker: Before we begin routine proceedings, when the House rose yesterday, the honourable member for La Vérendrye was speaking on a matter of privilege.

I will now recognize that member to continue with their remarks.

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): Thank you for the opportunity to continue on this very important matter of privilege. I'll try to be concise and wrap up the concerns that I've brought forward yesterday and continue on.

When I had left off, I had expressed my concern about the Minister responsible for Manitoba Public Insurance giving not only myself, but my constituents misleading information, which restricts my ability to serve my constituents as the Member of the Legislative Assembly for La Vérendrye, and it also restricts all of our abilities to give information back to the members of our constituencies.

So this minister won't answer our questions in the House, tries to limit my ability to discuss these matters in the House and contradicts his own officials. How can MLAs rely on the information coming out of this government? The NDP want to dodge our questions in the House and want to mislead Manitobans about their intentions with something as important as our public auto insurer.

I want to go back to my constituents who raised this issue with me and see if they were set. I wanted to go back to my constituents to see if they were satisfied with the minister's response. And asking them and talking to the ones that had the concerns, they were just downright confused.

Many went back to their local brokers, brokers across this entire province, and called Manitoba Public Insurance directly. The response they received off—from the letter was not the same as that that they received from their broker.

The NDP need to start acting like a government and stop trying to limit the flow of information in this House. I refer to House of Commons Procedure and Practice, second edition, commonly known as O'Brien and Bosc, for guidance on this difficult question.

On page 111, O'Brien and Bosc wrote: A member may also be obstructed or interfered within the performance of his or her parliamentary functions by non-physical means. In ruling on such matters, the Speaker examines the effect of the incident or event had on the member's ability to fulfill his or her parliamentary responsibilities. If the Speaker's view—the—if the Speaker views that the member was not obstructed in the performance of his or her parliamentary duties and function, then a prima facie breach of privilege cannot be found.

That is from page 11 of O'Brien—111 of O'Brien and Bosc, which is the undisputed source of information regarding the appropriate way in which we ought to understand parliamentary privilege in this House as well as in Legislative Houses across this country. And this type of interference is one that cannot be fully enumerated in advance. As O'Brien and Bosc wrote, it is impossible to codify all incidents which might be interpreted as matters of obstruction, interference and intimidation and as such, constitute prima facie cases of privilege.

It must be noted that information which is misleading is not the same as false information. The standard definition of misleading is that a statement of assertion gives the wrong idea or impression. However, it is clear that the partial presentation of information which is its own is not incorrect can nonetheless give the wrong idea to a reasonable observer.

Thus it bears repeating, the standard of the interference of a member's ability to do their job and does not require them to show that the government provided false information, only misleading information. This is a weaker test, Honourable Speaker, but one that nonetheless infringes the ability of a member to do their job. It almost goes without saying that the provision of false information is clearly a case of misleading a member.

Thus, it is established that false information has been put on the record in this House. Then this will impede a member of their duty. In this instance, the failure of the government to provide information misleads this House about the true state of the government's action and as such, breaches my privilege as a legislator.

I believe I have presented this matter at the earliest opportunity, as I have given the minister adequate time since the start of session to provide adequate information before the House, and I believe the phrase earliest opportunity must be understood in a reasonable sense.

This interference that I speak of is not in the matter of physical terms. Interference is understood in the discussion of privilege or contempt will go beyond the mere interference, say, of the member's ability to enter this House. Rather, it will extend to any matter which impedes a member's ability to do their job.

The failure of the minister to fulfill their legislated duties has impeded on my ability to adequately perform my parliamentary duty or representing my constituents. As the critic for Infrastructure for the official opposition, I cannot properly advocate for Manitobans when the minister and the NDP government will not be publicly accountable. My months of advocating on behalf of Manitobans as the critic for this portfolio would be much better served if the NDP government were more accountable, as they have promised.

Precious months have been wasted as this government distracts from the truth of their record. This includes: their failures with child welfare; their failure to address surgical backlogs and to staff our health-care

system; their failures on long-term gas tax savings; their interference at Manitoba Hydro; and now, their failures to address special risk extension policies and their potential for privatizing our public insurer.

* (13:40)

I move, and seconded by the member from Lakeside, that this matter be moved to an all-party committee for consideration.

Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Before recognizing other members to speak on the matter of privilege, there are several guests in the gallery that I would like to acknowledge.

First we have students seated in the public gallery from Fairholme school, 20 grade 9 students under the direction of Evelyn Maendel. The group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Lakeside (Mr. King).

We also have seated in the public gallery Monica Helms from Atlanta, Georgia. She is the creator of the trans flag, who is the guest of the honourable member for Kirkfield Park (Mr. Oxenham).

On behalf of all members, welcome.

Further guests in the public gallery: I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery, where we have with us today from Agape Table: Robert Lassi, Laura Henderson, Monalise [*phonetic*] Ngomti, Cathe Umlah, Jim Steep, Aaron Scarff, Kanylisola [*phonetic*] Oni, Kyla Watson [*phonetic*], Amy Oliver, Charlie Oliver, Piper Oliver, and they are all guests of the honourable member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara).

And all—behalf of all of us, welcome.

* * *

The Speaker: And now, before I recognize members to speak, I would like to remind all members of the House that remarks at this time by honourable members are to be limited strictly to relevant comments about whether the alleged matter of privilege has been raised at the earliest opportunity and whether a prima facie case has been established.

No other members wishing to speak? Then I have a ruling for the House.

On the matter of privilege raised by the honourable member for La Vérendrye (Mr. Narth), I would

like to inform the House that this is clearly a difference of facts. Past Manitoba Speakers have ruled on several similar occasions that a dispute between two members as to allegations of fact does not constitute a breach of privilege.

Bosc and Gagnon advise, on page 148 of *The House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, that if a question of privilege involves a disagreement between two or more members as to facts, the Speaker typically rules that such a dispute does not prevent members from fulfilling their parliamentary functions, nor does such a disagreement breach the collective privileges of the House.

Beauchesne citation 31(1) advises that a dispute arising between two members as to allegations of facts does not fulfill the conditions of parliamentary privilege.

Joseph Maingot, on page 223 of the second edition of *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada*, states: a dispute between two members around questions of facts said in a debate does not constitute a valid question of privilege because it is a matter of debate.

I would therefore rule that the honourable member does not have a prima facie case of privilege.

MATTER OF PRIVILEGE

Mr. Derek Johnson (Interlake-Gimli): Matter of privilege, please.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Interlake-Gimli, on a matter of privilege.

Mr. Johnson: Now, we're all excited to get to routine proceedings, so I'll make my remarks brief.

Honourable Speaker, it pains me to have to rise on a matter of privilege this afternoon, but to paraphrase what one of my colleagues said yesterday, we can only resume lawmaking in the House when members opposite stop breaking the rules.

Yesterday, my colleague for Agassiz raised concerns about a press availability that the Premier (Mr. Kinew) and Minister of label—Labour had, where they divulged details of bills that have not been introduced in this House. While I disagreed with your ruling, Honourable Speaker, I respect you and I, of course, respect the rule and direction that you provide to this Assembly.

That is why it's so disheartening to see the shameful behaviour of the Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care (MLA Asagwara).

In your ruling against my colleague, you advised all members to protect the right of this House to see legislation first. I refer you back to the matter that my friend from Agassiz raised, as I don't need to reinvent the wheel, so to speak. Most of what she had to say is valid in this instance as well.

This is the first opportunity I could raise to address this matter, and clearly a prima facie breach of privilege, which many Speakers before have established and maintained. So, as Speaker Milliken said in 2010, and I quote: It is indisputable that it is a well-established practice and accepted convention that this House has the right of first access to the text of bills that it will consider. End quote.

And earlier, in 2001, I quote: The convention of the confidentiality of bills on notice is necessary not only so that those members themselves may be well informed, but also because of the pre-eminent role which this House plays and must play in the legislative affairs of the nation.

I urge you, Honourable Speaker, to take this previous ruling of the long-serving Speaker, as well as many, many others, to assist you in your deliberation. I table a copy of the Winnipeg Free Press article in which the minister discussed specific details of the legislation and is happy of being quoted as so. I also table yesterday's and today's Order Paper, to show that these bills have not been made available to members in this Chamber.

The scope and the duties of the proposed seniors advocate are expressed, as are different forms of complaint this new office will be empowered to investigate. The minister even spoke about the deliberation and potential limits on the mandate of the office. And I quote: The mandate of the seniors advocate is going to allow for that office to investigate different themes, be it health care or be it housing issues. End quote.

Honourable Speaker, this is doubly concerning because not only is this a breach of long-standing rules, but it flies in the face of specific instructions that you gave everyone in this very Chamber yesterday. It is contempt of the highest order, and it cannot stand.

There are rules in this Assembly, as in life, and members opposite cannot exempt themselves from them when they find it inconvenient. I remind you, Honourable Speaker, the traditional consequence of blatantly disregarding the authority of the Chair is to be named and expelled from this Chamber.

Therefore, I move, seconded by the member for Midland (Mrs. Stone), that this House refer this matter to an all-party for review.

The Speaker: Before recognizing any other members to speak, I would remind the House that all remarks at this time by honourable members are limited to strictly relevant comments about whether the matter of privilege has been raised at the earliest opportunity, and whether a prima facie case has been established.

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader): It pains me to have to get up in this Chamber for a third day in a row to respond to some of the erroneous matters of privilege that each and every one of the members opposite have wasted our time over the last three days.

* (13:50)

I would have thought that today would have been the day that they would have looked in the mirror and they would have said, you know what? Today's the day we're going to get to work. We're going to do work that we're actually elected to do.

And yet here we are again, with guests in the gallery, who have taken their time out of their busy schedules to sit and listen to this utter nonsense.

Let me just say this, Honourable Speaker. The member—the minister for Health didn't break any of the rules. The minister was simply expressing the many concerns and recommendations and vision that members in the community have been bringing forth for many, many years, including the members that were sitting up there and had to sit through a couple of hours of nonsense coming from members opposite.

And it really is the hypocrisy of, then, the member to stand up and try to raise a matter of privilege when all of them had no qualms about waving and welcoming them while they were actually wasting their time, and standing in the way of the Minister of Health to be able to introduce a bill on a seniors advocate office.

It's simply hypocrisy coming from the members.

Again, Honourable Speaker, my hope is that today the members opposite look at each other and say, you know what? We're going to work today. We're actually going to earn our salaries today and we're going to work.

Miigwech, Honourable Speaker.

The Speaker: A matter of privilege is a very serious concern. I'm going to take this matter under advisement and I will return to the House with a ruling.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 208—The Two-Spirit and Transgender Day of Visibility Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended)

Mr. Logan Oxenham (Kirkfield Park): I move, seconded by the honourable Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care (MLA Asagwara), that Bill 208, The Two-Spirit and Transgender Day of Visibility Act (Commemoration of Days, Weeks and Months Act Amended), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Oxenham: Honourable Speaker, Bill 208, The Two-Spirit and Transgender Day of Visibility Act will designate March 31st as a time to acknowledge the historical and global presence of those who challenge traditional views of gender and celebrate their existence.

It notes the harmful impact of transphobia, discriminatory laws and lack of access to gender-affirming care. It is important to recognize the agency of youth in understanding gender identity and expression and the positive impact that gender-affirming care has on one's mental health.

Two-spirit and transgender day of visibility is an opportunity to celebrate the existence of two-spirit, transgender and non-binary people. Like all Manitobans, we deserve love, respect and joy.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

The Speaker: Further tabling? Further—is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? [*Agreed*]

Further introduction of bills? Committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

The Speaker: And I have a report to table.

In accordance with section 58.8(2), The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, section 48.14(2) of The Personal Health Information Act, I'm tabling the Annual Report of the Information and Privacy Adjudicator for the year ending December 31, 2023.

No further reports?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Seal River Watershed Alliance

Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Minister of Environment and Climate Change): I rise today in the House to acknowledge the Seal River Watershed Alliance for their leadership, perseverance and commitment to the land and all that it teaches us.

In January of this year, the government of Manitoba stood up alongside representatives from the Seal River Watershed Alliance, Indigenous nations and the Government of Canada to sign a historic MOU to formally work together on a feasibility assessment to establish a potential Indigenous protected and conserved area and a possible national park reserve in the Seal River Watershed.

Located in northern Manitoba, this 50,000-square-kilometre Seal River Watershed is one of the largest remaining ecologically intact watersheds in the world. Portions of the watershed are currently protected by three Manitoba wilderness parks and an ecological reserve, but protecting it in its entirety with this proposed Indigenous protected and conserved area would ensure its well-being for the long term.

As one of the largest intact watersheds on the planet, the Seal River Watershed is home to a significant percentage of Manitoba's diverse ecosystems, it's a natural carbon sink that captures harmful greenhouse gasses, and many sacred Indigenous lands.

The Seal River Watershed study area, which makes up nearly 8 per cent of the land in Manitoba, is a major step forward in our government's commitment to protect 30 per cent of Manitoba's lands and waters by the year 2030. The creation of an Indigenous protected and conserved area would allow this ecologically significant watershed to continue to safeguard biodiversity and at-risk species in Manitoba. There are at least 22 known species at risk living in the region, from polar bears to wolverines to orcas.

Our profound gratitude goes out to our partners at the Seal River Watershed Alliance, as well as Sayisi Dene First Nation, Northlands Denesuline First Nation, Barren Lands First Nation and O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation for their expertise and collaboration on this monumental project.

Next week, March 27, I invite all members to attend the screening of a new documentary film, *We Are Made from the Land*, being held at the Winnipeg Art Gallery. *We Are Made from the Land* tells the story of four First Nations working to create the Seal

River Watershed Indigenous-protected area in northern Manitoba, to care for the caribou, heal from forced relocation, strengthen cultures and sustain the land for all people. Anyone interested to attend can register online on the Winnipeg Art Gallery's website or the Seal River Watershed website.

I would like to acknowledge three leaders in the gallery, from the alliance, for the record, Honourable Speaker: Stephanie Thorassie, Justice Henderson and Mandy Wallman.

Thank you so much.

The Speaker: The honourable Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

MLA Schmidt: I just want to extrapolate and add one more name to the list, if I can, and that is of the late, great Ernie Bussidor, who was a founder of the Seal River Watershed Alliance and who we recently and tragically lost. So I just wanted to add his name and recognize his important work to the alliance.

Thank you very much. Thank you.

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): It's my pleasure to rise today and respond to the minister's statement.

Like all Manitobans, Progressive Conservatives care deeply about the environment and the conservation of our natural landscapes, wildlife habitat and fisheries. We're proud to have pioneered protections in the 1990s. We're proud that over the last seven years we have designated three new provincial parks, designated the first-ever provincially significant peatlands and signed a partnership with the federal government to plant an extra 1 million trees every year in communities across Manitoba.

Today, Manitoba has the unique opportunity to preserve the Seal River Watershed, one of the last untouched watersheds in the world.

* (14:00)

In June of 2022, I was appointed the Minister of Natural Resources and Northern Development. Six months later, Manitoba agreed to participate in a tripartite feasibility study with Parks Canada and the Seal River Watershed Alliance for the Seal River Watershed area.

I was tasked and honoured to lead a whole-of-government approach and establish a working group with the Manitoba and federal governments. This was

a clear signal that PCs value conservation and biodiversity and that we will also work to ensure Manitoba's economic interests are protected.

On this side of the House, we share in the vision of working in partnership with First Nations to advance reconciliation and sustainable economic development in Northern Manitoba.

The Seal River Watershed should be a showcase of where the environment and the economy can co-exist in the 21st century, one not affecting the other.

On this side of the House, we hope to see protections of the watershed move forward, but we urge this NDP government to make informed, data-driven decisions to conserve natural areas while considering economic realities. This NDP government cannot rely on slogans or buzzwords, or rigidly adhere to arbitrary targets to get this work done.

We encourage this NDP government and the Environment Minister to listen to her department to ensure that the federal government compensates Manitoba financially for any lost economic opportunity with respect to mining and forestry and to take up the goodwill of all Manitobans who wish to be involved in protecting the Seal River Watershed without sacrificing unnecessarily either the environment or economic development.

Thank you.

Journée internationale de la Francophonie

Hon. Glen Simard (Minister of Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism): J'ai l'honneur de prendre la parole aujourd'hui dans cette Chambre en français pour souligner la Journée internationale de la Francophonie.

Le 20 mars, nous célébrons avec plus que 320 millions de personnes à travers le monde qui parlent le français.

Le thème pour 2024, « Créer, innover, entreprendre en français », souligne le fait que le français n'est pas seulement une langue d'apprentissage, mais aussi une langue qui appuie l'employabilité et le développement économique.

Au Manitoba, nous sommes fiers d'être plus de 110 000 personnes qui peuvent converser dans nos deux langues officielles, qu'il s'agisse d'une—de notre langue maternelle ou une langue additionnelle.

Translation

I am honoured to stand in this House today and speak in French to mark the International Day of the Francophonie.

On March 20, we celebrate with more than 320 million people around the world who speak French.

The theme for 2024, "Create, Innovate, Undertake in French", highlights the fact that French is not only a language of learning, but also a language that supports employability and economic development.

In Manitoba, we are proud to be over 110,000 people who can converse in both official languages, whether French is our mother tongue or an additional language.

English

In Manitoba, we are proud to be over 110,000 people who are bilingual in both official languages, whether French is our mother tongue or additional language.

D'ailleurs, notre francophonie est de plus en plus diversifiée. L'immigration et les nouveaux arrivants d'expression française jouent un rôle essentiel dans la vitalité de nos communautés.

Il ne faut pas oublier non plus les contributions des nombres grandissant d'anglophones et d'allophones qui reconnaissent la valeur ajoutée du bilinguisme. Leur décision d'apprendre le français vient enrichir notre province.

Translation

Additionally, our Francophone community is increasingly diverse, with immigration and French-speaking newcomers playing an essential role in the vitality of our communities.

Nor should we forget the contributions of growing numbers of anglophones and allophones who recognize the added value of bilingualism. Their decision to learn French enriches our province.

English

We must not also forget the contributions of the growing number of anglophones and allophones who recognize the added value of bilingualism and whose decision to learn French also enriches our province.

La popularité de nos écoles d'immersion et de la Division scolaire franco-manitobaine démontre que la population manitobaine accorde une grande importance à l'apprentissage du français.

Le français est une langue riche et dynamique. Chaque francophone a son accent, sa façon de parler et cette variété inclusive fait sa force. Le français unit les peuples, crée les espaces de solidarité et de compréhension mutuelle et ainsi nous aide à mieux imaginer notre avenir partagé.

En tant que le ministre responsable des Affaires francophones, je suis fier de rendre hommage à cette communauté et de célébrer ses contributions à la province.

Comme gouvernement, nous œuvrons pour améliorer les services en français et nous espérons que le Manitoba soit une province véritablement bilingue.

Translation

The popularity of our immersion schools and the Division scolaire franco-manitobaine shows that Manitobans attach great importance to learning French.

French is a rich and dynamic language. Each Francophone has his or her own accent and way of speaking, and this inclusive variety is its strength. French unites people, creates spaces for solidarity and mutual understanding, and helps us better imagine our shared future.

As the Minister responsible for Francophone Affairs, I am proud to honour this community and celebrate its contributions to the province.

As a government, we are working to improve French language services and we hope to make Manitoba a truly bilingual province.

English

As a government, we are striving to improve French language services and one day, we hope that Manitoba will be a truly bilingual province.

Je demande à tous les membres de l'Assemblée de se joindre à moi pour souligner la Journée internationale de la Francophonie, de reconnaître nos invités spéciaux dans la tribune publique et de célébrer le fait français au Manitoba.

Translation

I ask all members of this House to join me in marking the International Day of the Francophonie, in recognizing our special guests in the public gallery and in celebrating the French fact in Manitoba.

MLA Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail): Aujourd'hui, le 20^e mars, c'est la Journée internationale de la Francophonie.

Le Manitoba est le foyer de plus de 36 000 francophones et notre grande province compte plus de 111 000 personnes qui parlent couramment le français et l'anglais.

Pour que la langue française reste forte au Manitoba, nous accueillons chaque année des nombreux immigrants francophones, que nous sommes fiers de présenter nos municipales bilingues et dynamiques, qui constituent d'excellentes attractions touristes.

Le Manitoba est également fier d'offrir aux élèves la possibilité de 'reçoive' leur éducation en français grâce au programme d'immersion en français qui est actuellement 'offrié' dans 115 écoles publiques réparties dans 23 divisions scolaires.

Les Manitobains peuvent également célébrer la culture française en participant à différentes activités telles que le Festival du Voyageur et le pavillon français du Folklorama.

Le Manitoba est fier de 'souhaiter' une division scolaire 'franco' forte, la division scolaire franco-manitobaine. Vingt-trois écoles francophones desservent 'acament' les Manitobains.

La langue française n'a pas toujours été célébrée et respectée comme elle est toujours—aujourd'hui. Pendant des décennies, le droit de parler et d'apprendre le français au Manitoba était sévèrement réprimé et les Franco-Manitobains étaient la cible de la haine.

C'est grâce aux hommes et aux femmes courageux qui ont défendu la langue française et les droits des francophones, comme Sœur Léonne Démécil [*phonétique*] et Georges Forest, que nous célébrons même une journée comme celle-ci, dont je suis 'profond' reconnaissant.

Merci, Monsieur le Président, et bonne journée de francophonie.

Translation

Today, March 20, is the International Day of La Francophonie.

Manitoba is home to more than 36,000 Francophones, and our great province is home to more than 111,000 people who are fluent in both French and English.

To keep the French language strong in Manitoba, we welcome many French-speaking immigrants each year, and are proud to showcase our vibrant, bilingual municipalities, which are excellent tourist attractions.

Manitoba is also proud to offer students the opportunity to get their education in French through the French Immersion program, which is currently offered in 115 public schools across 23 school divisions.

Manitobans can also celebrate French culture through activities such as the Festival du Voyageur and Folklorama's French Pavilion.

Manitoba is proud to support a strong French school division, the Division scolaire franco-manitobaine. Twenty-three French-language schools currently serve Manitobans.

French has not always been as celebrated and respected as it is today. For decades, the right to speak French and learn French was severely repressed in Manitoba, and Franco-Manitobans were the targets of hatred.

It is thanks to the courageous men and women who defended the French language and the rights of Francophones, like Sister Léonne Dumesnil and Georges Forest, that we even celebrate a day like this, for which I am deeply grateful.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker, and happy Francophonie Day.

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I ask for leave to respond to the minister's statement.

The Speaker: Does the member from Tyndall Park have leave? [*Agreed*]

MLA Lamoureux: Today on March 20, we celebrate the International Francophonie Day as a commitment to not only the French language and the rich and diverse francophone culture, but the values of peace, democracy and respect for human rights that unite all members of the International Organization of La Francophonie, all of these qualities, which are reflected by our first premier, Louis Riel.

The Legislative Assemblies of Canada and five provinces, including Manitoba, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Ontario and Quebec, are members of the parliamentary assembly of the OIF.

The date was chosen to celebrate the anniversary of the agency for cultural and technical co-operation back in 1970, marking the first steps toward francophone co-operation, which would eventually become the International Organization of La Francophonie.

There are over 369 million French speakers on Earth, 7 million in Canada and over 40,000 here in the province of Manitoba. Celebrating La Francophonie is recognizing the potential of language and culture to

unite people, to create spaces of solidarity and mutual understanding to reflect together on our common future and, in today's world, providing an inspiring vision of placing culture and languages at the heart of any lasting effort for peace.

In Canada and around the world, the French language has always had an important place among languages, first as a symbol of culture and creativity, then as a path of democracy and humanism.

Today, we join francophones and francophiles in celebrating the French language and the tremendous contributions to our rich cultural heritage and history here in Manitoba.

* (14:10)

In closing, Honourable Speaker, I'd like to thank those who have joined us today in the gallery as well as the minister for hosting such a wonderful event earlier today and bringing forward today's ministerial statement.

Thank you.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Agape Table

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): Our communities are stronger when we lift each other up. And today, I'd like to recognize the impactful work of the folks at Agape Table, the sponsors and volunteers who serve communities in downtown Winnipeg, in Union Station.

At Agape Table, they believe there is hope in nutrition, dignity in choice and power for change in the community.

For over 15 years, Agape Table has ensured folks in the community have something to eat every day of the week with their free breakfast program and their emergency food shelter. In total, these programs have served over 150,000 meals, provided over 15,000 food hampers to feed our community. And on top of this, their organization is a community space for gathering, friendship and compassion.

Folks who use their services range from those without housing and low-income seniors to working single parents and newcomers who are adjusting to life in Winnipeg. I've had the pleasure of volunteering with these folks, and their kindness, humour and vulnerable storytelling stayed with me a long time and stays with me to this day.

Agape Table has seen record numbers of people seeking aid this winter. As food and living costs rise, we must support organizations that dedicate their time to those in need. I encourage folks to donate food, clothing and hygiene products if you are able to do so.

I want to especially thank Piper and Charlie, incredible 10-year-old volunteers, and all the volunteers who put in over 2,000 hours each month to run the programs that ensure our neighbours have warm clothes and food that they need all year long, but especially during the cold winter months.

Now, as our government puts forward strong policies to address the issues of food insecurity, homelessness and inconnection throughout the province, it's important that organizations like Agape Table are here to remind us that we have—

The Speaker: Order, please. Order, please.

It's against the rules for the member, during a member's statement—for the minister, during a member's statement, to reference government policy.

MLA Asagwara: Honourable Speaker, every person deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. Our communities flourish when we recognize that our lives are interconnected, dependent on one another and that we embrace the opportunity to lift each other up.

I'd like to ask my colleagues to join me in thanking Agape Table for their dedication and their amazing commitment to our communities in need.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Brandon West (Mr. Balcaen).

Oh, sorry. The honourable Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care (MLA Asagwara).

MLA Asagwara: I just want to ensure that the names of Charlie Oliver and Piper Oliver, who are 10 years old, Amy Oliver, Robert Lassi, Laura Henderson, Monalisa Ngomti, Cathe Umlah, Jim Steep, Aaron Scarff, Kanyinsola Oni and Kyla Walton are on the permanent record of this House.

The Speaker: For the information of the honourable member, leave is not required, for rule 28(3) states that if a member wishes to have names of individuals included in the Hansard transcript, individuals referenced in their statements, they provide a list to Hansard before 5 o'clock today. Up to 50 names will be permitted. *[interjection]* Okay. And the fact that you read them in the record means they are, in fact, already in the record.

The honourable minister for Brandon—or, the honourable member for Brandon West.

Manitoba Winter Fair

Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West): Honourable Speaker, one week from today, my home city of Brandon will be hosting the world-class Royal Manitoba Winter Fair. This spring break tradition that has ran for 150 years will again be buzzing with excitement March 25th to the 30th.

I would like to personally extend an invitation to my colleagues on all sides of the House and all Manitobans of every age to come to Brandon as the Royal Manitoba Winter Fair has something for everyone.

You can experience first-hand equestrian events, heavy horse competition, hands-on agricultural education programs, super dogs, commercial trade show exhibits and so much more. This year will offer exceptional live entertainment with new and exciting acts.

The Royal Manitoba Winter Fair kicks off at 7 a.m. on Monday with a sunrise breakfast where I'll be helping serve breakfast to hundreds of fairgoers. It will be a full week of continuous enjoyment, meeting constituents and having quality time at the fair with my wife, children and grandchildren.

I would be remiss not to mention the incredible economic impact the fair brings to the city with an increase in tourism by attracting not just only local, but national and international visitors.

This fair would not be possible without the incredibly dedicated staff and hundreds of volunteers that make this fair the great success that it is, and for that I thank each and every one of you.

Thank you to the Provincial Exhibition of Manitoba, an amazing organization, for sponsoring this renowned event.

On July 11, 1970, the Brandon Winter Fair was granted patronage by a visit from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and became the Royal Manitoba Winter Fair. As one of only two fairs in Canada to receive this designation, I guarantee that when you attend Brandon for the fair, you will receive the royal treatment.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Filipino United Community Church

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): Honourable Speaker, magandang hapon po *[good afternoon]*.

The constituency of Burrows is home to a thriving Filipino population that has grown ever since people from the Philippines started calling Manitoba their home in the 1950s. With a rapid growth in their population, it was important to minister to the needs of Filipino Canadians in Manitoba. Hence, the Filipino United Community Church was formally organized in June of 1986 in Winnipeg. Soon the church will be celebrating its 40th anniversary with an active and intergenerational membership of over 300 people.

The positive efforts of the Filipino United Community Church are visible across our province. They organize yearly neighbourhood cleanup efforts and collect clothes, shoes and other items as part of donation drives to promote sustainability and give back to the community. In partnership with Union Gospel Mission, they also organize food drives during Easter and Thanksgiving each year. Beyond our province, the church has sent financial support to those affected through their ministry partners as millions of folks around the world face natural disasters and international conflicts.

The church holds services every Sunday and gathers for English and Tagalog Sunday school after their time of worship. Many members participate in a singing group which visits nursing homes every first and third Sunday of the month to sing hymns and read psalms of—to the residents.

The Filipino United Community Church focuses on educating children through theatrical performances and religious education. They host weekly Bible study sessions, spiritual retreats, summer camps for youth and families and have well-attended youth program.

I have been connected with the church for the past few years and seen how their activities have strengthened community ties—

The Speaker: Order, please. Member's time has expired.

An Honourable Member: Leave.

The Speaker: Is there leave for him to finish his statement? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Brar: I have been connected with the church for the past few years and seen how their activities have strengthened community ties for many residents of Burrows. In the gallery today, we are joined by Pastor Victor Cuarto, the lead pastor at Filipino United Community Church, along with many others from the congregation whose names I ask be entered into Hansard.

I urge members in the Chamber to thank all the members of this welcoming, community-minded congregation for their important work.

Mabuhay. *[Live.]*

Alfred Aguila, Casiano Alegro, Carlos Bautista, Leticia Bautista, Hannah Victoria Cuarto, Maria Luisa Cuarto, Victor Immanuel Cuarto, Maripin Europa, Agripina Garcia, Mariano Garcia, Jean Padrinao, Hannah Victoria

* (14:20)

Souris Survivor Bonspiel

Mr. Grant Jackson (Spruce Woods): I rise today to highlight the Souris Survivor bonspiel. Always held over spring break, this year, curlers of all ages will descend into Souris March 27 to 31, and it features events for men's, women's, masters, two-person stick curling, U15 juniors and U13 juniors.

In total, this event has 96 teams registered, over 380 curlers and is well on its way to a full-scale recovery to pre-pandemic levels. This year, the event features curling club and arena ice, two socials with live bands, a catered dinner for curlers and the community and, of course, great prizes.

In—over its more than 20-year history, this bonspiel has become a staple of Souris's event calendar year, has raised almost \$200,000 for the Souris and Glenwood Memorial Complex and has become well known across the province for its different theme each year, this year being it's Canada Eh!

Of course, events like this can't take place without volunteers. They are the backbone of countless events that support our communities, and Survivor is no exception. I want to tank the—take this opportunity to thank all of the current and past board members of both the Souris Survivor bonspiel and the Souris Curling Club for ensuring this event continues to bring people to Souris.

And so, in that theme, from March 27 to 31, I'd like to invite all members and all Manitobans to Souris to, as the slogan goes, outwit, outplay and outlast at the Souris Survivor bonspiel 2024.

Thank you.

Newcomers Employment and Education Development Services

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I rise this afternoon to acknowledge and celebrate the remarkable 25-year anniversary of Newcomers Employment and

Education Development Services that we all know as NEEDS Inc.

NEEDS is a beacon of hope and support for newcomers to Canada. The organization was founded in 1999 by a CEO, Margaret von Lau, whose vision is rooted in her own personal journey and experiences as an immigrant in Canada.

Now, over the past 25 years, NEEDS has been instrumental in helping many newcomers in their journey to integrate into Canadian society. As a non-profit, charitable organization, they provide accessible services and support to over 2,000 newcomer and refugee children, youth and their families every single year. NEEDS plays an indispensable role in enriching Manitoba's communities and easing the transition of newcomers into life in Canada.

At the heart of NEEDS, there is a commitment to empower newcomers through employment, mentorship, education and social recreational programs. These initiatives serve as a vital pathway to the development of essential life skills, confidence and positive social support networks for newcomer children, youth and their families.

Honourable Speaker, this significant milestone highlights the profound impact that NEEDS has had on our newcomer community here in Winnipeg.

Now, before wrapping up, I have three quick points.

Firstly, I want to congratulate Margaret and all her staff at NEEDS for their unwavering commitment to supporting newcomers as they reflect the core values of inclusivity and diversity that define our nation.

Secondly, following question period, I would like to invite all my MLA colleagues to join us for a group photo on the grand staircase.

And lastly, I'd like to ask my colleagues to join me here this afternoon in congratulating and recognizing NEEDS on their great work.

Thank you.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Gas Pipeline Shutdown Fuel Supply Concerns

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Leader of the Official Opposition): One week. Just one week of fuel. The Premier told CJOB radio Monday morning, and I quote: We're told there's about a week's worth of gasoline.

Then suddenly, later on Monday, the Premier told the media there's no reason for the public to panic or for people to stock up on fuel.

One week left, but don't panic. Perhaps the Premier was too honest in the morning, and his propaganda machine took over by the afternoon.

So which is it, Honourable Speaker? Are we in immediate crisis with our fuel supply or not?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): This is a serious issue, and it's one that Manitobans are going to have to learn to live with, all of us together, for the next few months.

Now, I want to assure the public that there are 50,000 barrels a day coming via train car. That's according to our supplier network.

So while the member opposite, on this very important issue, refused to ask a question about it until Wednesday, because he was more concerned with procedural delay tactics to oppose a piece of legislation that even Pierre Poilievre supported, we, on the other hand, have been hard at work. We're hard at work ensuring that there's an adequate supply.

We continue the good work under the auspices of our Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) to keep fuel prices affordable in Manitoba, and we're going to continue delivering for you, the people of this great province.

The Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a supplementary question.

Pause to the Gas Tax Request for Extension

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Leader of the Official Opposition): Unfortunately, the Premier keeps breaking the rules, and so we have to keep standing up on matters of privilege for all Manitobans.

The pipeline shutdown will affect over 1 million people for three months and possibly more. We know that demand for fuel will surpass supply, no matter what inflated numbers of trucks or railcars the Premier claims are on the way. And we know the backdrop for this rapidly unfolding crisis is the spectre of an increasing carbon tax and the end of the government's failed gas tax blip.

The Premier stated to media there's no, I quote, showmanship in providing relief and reassurance to Manitobans.

Would he spare Manitobans the theatrics and just announce an extension to the gas tax pause today, or is he more showman than statesman?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): Honourable Speaker, to you and everybody across the province, on January 1 of this year, we cut the provincial fuel tax to save you money.

Now, it's an interesting approach for the Leader of the Opposition to say, hey, government, great work, do more of what you're been—what your government is doing, but certainly we welcome that for due consideration.

I do, however, have to call out one of the misstatements that he just made. He was not standing up for any rules; he was standing up for himself when he started the procedural delays on Monday. He's more concerned with answering charges that he's transphobic than standing up on these issues that affect the people of Manitoba.

I'll tell you where we stand. On this side of the House, we understand it's not about us. It's about you, the people of Manitoba. That's why we're going to be with you through this situation regarding the pipeline, and that's why we're going to continue delivering affordability relief at the pump.

The Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a final supplementary question.

Pipeline Shutdown and Carbon Tax Impact on Fuel Prices

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Leader of the Official Opposition): We see that the bullying tactics and the rule-breaking continues today.

We know that the price of gas has increased by 30 cents since the beginning of this government's failed gas tax blip, and the Premier won't commit to extend it.

Manitobans are worried that a supply shortage caused by this pipeline shutdown will lead to further increases to the cost of gas. Manitobans know the carbon tax hike will make things even worse April 1.

I table the picture of premiers who are standing up for their provinces. You know who—you know who—is missing.

What is the Premier doing that the prices will not skyrocket, since we already know he's not standing up for Manitobans on the carbon tax?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): On the subject of breaking rules, the Leader of the Opposition broke two there. You're not supposed to use props in question period and you're supposed to bring enough copies to

table for the House. He didn't fulfill either of those criteria.

Now, one thing that we are doing is saving Manitobans money every day at the pump. Through the measures that we've taken to cut the provincial fuel tax to zero, we have the lowest cost of gasoline in the entire country.

Our government has a steady hand. We have a steady hand when you're tightening the lug nut. We have a steady hand when you're filling up, the pump. We have a steady hand when it's on the wheel.

Them on the other side, when they go to refill the washer fluid, most of the liquid ends up on the ground. That's why they're not fit to govern and we are. A steady hand on the wheel producing results for you, the people of Manitoba.

* (14:30)

Incidents Involving Children in CFS Care Response Request from Families Minister

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): Honourable Speaker, Manitobans have many questions for this government. After Winnipeg police identified a group of kids in care committing violent robberies because they'd fallen through the cracks in the system, the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs and the child advocate were quick to comment.

This Minister of Families (MLA Fontaine) was not, because when media reached out, she was in New York and unavailable. This is the NDP's government's idea of working. This is NDP leadership.

Can this minister explain why she never seems to have time to discuss the children in her care?

The Speaker: I—[interjection]

Order, please. Order please.

I would caution the member about indicating whether people are present or not present. While you didn't specifically say not in the House, you indicated that she wasn't here.

Thank you.

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): The issue of doing better by children in care, and by doing better for all people in Manitoba to make our community safer, is an important one.

And that's why we're proud to work with folks in the child-welfare system, to work with foster parents,

to work with law enforcement, to work with community organizations to bring together a comprehensive plan to respond to the current situation.

Now, the Minister for Families was undertaking important work on behalf of the Province of Manitoba, and advocating for gender equity, not just here in the province, but internationally. Surely, that is an important priority.

At the same time, our government is standing up a public safety summit to be held on April 30, bringing together all the various stakeholders so that we can agree on one plan to improve things for you, the people of Manitoba.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Midland, on a supplementary question.

Child Welfare System Call for Public Inquiry

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): Honourable Speaker, the system has failed these children. I want to credit my Liberal colleague to raise this important issue the first day we returned to this House.

But the minister was too busy. The chief of police has said this is critical. The child's advocate has said this is critical. Yet this is her department, and she is too busy.

When will she start taking this seriously and call for a public inquiry into the failings of the CFS system?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): Ensuring that young Manitobans, who are our collective responsibility, not just as the Province of Manitoba but all of us as the people of Manitoba, is indeed a sacred trust. We know that the members opposite are alluding to an inquiry, and that's a pacific instance. There's a responsibility to ensure, first, that the investigation by law enforcement, and then the process through the prosecution, is carried to its logical conclusion.

Now, we recognize that it is important to be open to an inquiry. But I do want to state that going back to the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, continuing on through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, going through the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry, going on through the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, continuing on through any number of inquests, there are existing recommendations about a path forward here, to not only make life better for young people, but also to improve life for everybody in Manitoba.

That's the implementation agenda that we're pursuing, and our Minister of Families (MLA Fontaine)—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Midland, on a final supplementary question.

Incidents Involving Children in CFS Care Response Request from Families Minister

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): Honourable Speaker, the minister is more concerned about likes on Twitter and shares of her Instagram reels than she is about Manitoba children. While she didn't take time to talk to the Free Press about this issue last week, she did have time to make a hype reel of her trip.

This minister of social media vanity needs to understand the job she signed up for, as—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order, please. Order, please. Order. Order.

Ministers and members are to be referred to either by their constituency or their ministerial title. Nothing else.

Mrs. Stone: Honourable Speaker, this minister needs to understand that she—job she signed up for is vitally important, and she needs to start showing up for it.

If this minister is too busy to do her job, then why won't she just resign and have someone else do it?

Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier): I'm proud to respond to the personal attacks on behalf of my colleague, the Minister of Families (MLA Fontaine).

The member for St. Johns (MLA Fontaine) is an inspiration to young Indigenous women. She is an inspiration to Indigenous women of all ages and, indeed, she is an inspiration to all Manitobans who believe in gender equity and reproductive justice, and I am proud to stand with her every single day of our political careers.

On the substantive matter of child welfare, we know that the status quo is not working, and that's why our minister and our government is working to try and improve the situation, to improve it for young people and to improve it for all Manitobans.

I do want to take this opportunity to let the members opposite know that we are planning to hold a media event tomorrow in the constituency—well, actually, in the community of Lac du Bonnet.

The Speaker: The member's time is expired.

Recent Incidents Involving Children in CFS Care Request for Government Address

Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West): Honourable Speaker, I've worked with Chief Smyth as a colleague and have a lot of respect for him and the work that he does with Winnipeg Police Service.

I was able to speak with him just last night. I know that he did not come forward as he did to raise his concerns lightly, and this Families Minister needs to understand that. We cannot allow Manitobans to feel unsafe on the streets, and we cannot allow vulnerable youth to fall through the system like this.

So I ask the minister: Has she met with Chief Smyth since she came back and addressed some of these concerns?

Hon. Matt Wiebe (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): The member opposite knows that I also met with Chief Smyth yesterday, had a chance to chat with law enforcement, and certainly shared some concerning facts with the police chief.

And the facts that the police chief so eloquently stated in the media and shared with me personally are that over two terms, over almost eight years of PC governance, that things had gotten worse and worse and worse in our city and in our province.

They understand that it's not just about law enforcement, but it's about getting to the root causes of crime. And that's why he believes in our message to Manitobans; he believes in our message of unity, and he stands—

The Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Balcaen: This minister needs to understand that even if her party is fundamentally anti-police, she needs to do what is best for Manitobans. She needs to get together with Chief Smyth, form a relationship and address this vital concern. We need to know what resources those responsible for these youth need, and this minister needs to stop the jet-setting and start governing.

If caregivers don't have the means to give these kids a stable life, we need to do more. What is this government doing to address this?

Mr. Wiebe: Well, while the member opposite is going to continue with the personal attacks in this Legislature, I can assure him that every single member on this side of the House is going to stand with Manitobans to make our communities safer, and we

will work together across government, across all departments, to support good programs, good projects like Lighthouses, the Lighthouses program which, across the province, has had real results—a program developed under the NDP, and a program that we're going to continue to build on.

But of course, under the PCs, 40 per cent increase in youth crime. This member opposite needs to answer for his former government's actions.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Brandon West, on a final supplementary.

Child Welfare System Call for Public Inquiry

Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West): Honourable Speaker, this is not a political issue. What is political is this minister's priorities. Rather than putting the needs of Manitoba youths first, she took a vanity trip. When confronted with the crisis in her portfolio, the minister couldn't even be reached by phone by our local media. That says all it needs to about priorities.

* (14:40)

This isn't just indiscriminate violence. It's violence being committed by youth that is—that this minister is responsible for.

So I echo my colleague's question that the minister refused to answer: When will she call a public inquiry into this crisis?

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister of Families): I have enormous respect for Chief Danny Smyth. In fact, we've worked together back when I was the Southern Chiefs director of justice; we've worked together for almost 20 years.

We worked together on files of sexually exploited children, we've worked together on files on MMIWG2S. I have enormous respect for him, and I will continue to have enormous respect for him and continue to work together in the best interest of Manitoba, and certainly the children that are in conflict with the law.

What I want to just caution, folks, is that the chief didn't have all of the facts at his disposal when he had that press conference. I would be very cautious to not paint all children with the same brush, contributing to—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Health-Care Advisory Committee Inquiry into Decision to Abolish

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): In January, the Minister of Health touted a new advisory committee led by their new political adviser, Dr. Eric Jacobsohn. While he's been here for three months now, no advisory committee has materialized.

The Premier's office admitted to the Winnipeg Free Press two weeks ago that the idea has been abandoned.

Can the minister please explain for the House, why has this expert-led panel of health-care workers has been shelved?

Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care): Honourable Speaker, in the last, about six months, I've had the absolute pleasure as the Minister for Health to meet with experts across the province.

It has been wonderful to have Dr. Jacobsohn, a highly regarded and respected critical-care doctor in our province, expert of the front lines, to be willing to be in an advisory role for our government and for myself.

His expert relationships across health care are informing us of how we move forward to strengthen health care and fix the damage of the previous government. I know that it's a foreign concept, an anomaly, to members opposite, to work with experts in health care. On this side of the House, Honourable Speaker, we're going to continue to listen to experts and make health care better for Manitobans.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Roblin, on a supplementary question.

Mrs. Cook: At the time of the announcement, Dr. Jacobsohn and the minister told the media that they would, quote, fill a provincial advisory table with health-care professionals from various areas and with wide-ranging expertise. Unquote.

They called it, quote, a collaborative mission to find people who want to serve and speak freely. Unquote.

Yet this collaborative mission has been completely scrapped. And in fact, we're still waiting for the NDP to provide any update on their plan to staff the health-care system at all.

Why is the NDP refusing to bring health-care workers to the table?

MLA Asagwara: Honourable Speaker, not only are we bringing health-care workers to the table, we're bringing the table some doughnuts, some coffee, some snacks, directly to them—directly to them. Just like yesterday morning, when we were at the Victoria General Hospital, on another stop of our listening tour, where we heard from experts in the health-care system at all levels and disciplines.

Honourable Speaker, it is an absolute honour to meet health-care workers where they're at, to create spaces where they get to contribute to our government's agenda of fixing the damage the previous government did to our health-care system, and I look forward to sharing more news about the experts that are going to be joining more tables to serve our government, to serve Manitobans across the province.

The Speaker: The honourable member from Roblin, on a final supplementary question.

Mrs. Cook: Honourable Speaker, I love doughnuts, too, but it's not a substitute for a seat at the real decision-making table. First the NDP cut the Diagnostic and Surgical Recovery Task Force, which was a team staffed by some of the best doctors, not only in Manitoba, but in all of Canada.

Now the NDP has abandoned a promised committee that was going to bring health-care workers to the table in discussions with the government. That's two avenues for front-line health-care workers to express their concerns and ideas, cut by this NDP government.

Can the minister please explain, why are they so averse to actually listening to health-care workers and bringing them to the real decision-making table?

MLA Asagwara: Honourable Speaker, real tables are the front lines of our health-care system. Real tables are in the living rooms of health-care workers whose voices were never heard or valued or respected by the previous government. Real tables are advisory tables that I look forward to sharing more news about.

And over the past six months, we've had the opportunity and the pleasure to meet folks across the health-care system who have continued to express they want to work with our government to fix the damage, the monumental damage done by every single member of the House opposite.

Honourable Speaker, we're going to pull that table together, we're going to do much more work to fix the damage done and we're going to make sure that no matter where you are in health care in Manitoba,

you're going to be a part of the solutions with our government—

The Speaker: Minister's time has expired.

The—[*interjection*]

Order. Order. Order.

Introduction of Labour Legislation House Rules and Minister's Comments

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): Honourable Speaker, I have a very simple question for the Minister of Labour and Immigration. The Premier (Mr. Kinew) can't give permission to break the rules of this House.

So I ask: Can the Minister of Labour and Immigration explain why the labour leaders knew the intimate details of a bill that still has not been introduced here in this Chamber?

Hon. Malaya Marcelino (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Thank you, member opposite, for that ridiculous question.

I stood here this past week, day after day, trying to share the intimate details of this legislation with members opposite, with the rest of the province, because it's good news for all Manitobans and all workers across this province.

But it was members opposite that had to talk about problems about their hairdos or whatever other kinds of issues that they were bringing up. [*interjection*] Okay, not for the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen). But all other issues about their hairdos, other kinds of—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Agassiz. [*interjection*]

Order.

Ms. Byram: Further to my question, Honourable Speaker, I table a copy of the press conference with the Premier and the minister, and I urge you to review this material. So, seriously consider it, please.

And can the minister explain what she meant by, what's another matter of privilege?

MLA Marcelino: You know what, honest—thank you, Honourable Speaker, and thank you, member, for another ridiculous question.

You know, actually, when the member was bringing that up yesterday, it was actually very, very disrespectful, because it—No. 1, it wasn't even a real matter of privilege. There were press there that were

asking me so many questions, and at the end, I wasn't able to share anything because of the rules of this House, which I very, very much respect.

In fact, if the honourable member would like to check out all the other kinds of press from CBC, from the Winnipeg Free Press, that describe that—what happened that day, they said that the minister was not able to share the details because it hadn't been introduced in the House before.

Again, a fake matter—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

Ms. Byram: So without these bills even introduced, the media has been reporting that the employer representatives that the NDP claim to have been listening to, alongside with their labour bosses, opposed every decision they made and called for moderation.

Why is this minister pretending to listen to both employers and organized labour if the only people she's listening to are the MFL and the CLC opinions? Are they going to be reflected in her legislation?

* (14:50)

MLA Marcelino: You know what? In October—on October of 2023, Manitobans elected a government with real leadership and real vision for the people of Manitoba.

What that vision entails is shared prosperity for all Manitobans, and that includes for business and for all workers across this province. I can get louder because I'm really proud of what this government is doing and what we're going to continue to do for the people of Manitoba.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Prompt Payment to Construction Companies Proclamation Timeline for Legislation

Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye): Prompt payment legislation has been advocated by construction associations across this entire country. Previously, our PC government brought forward prompt payment legislation that received unanimous consent from this Legislature. Yet this NDP government has ragged the puck on enacting the relevant regulations and refused to do required consultations for proclamation of the bill.

Can the minister answer why this NDP government is refusing to move forward on the bill that they voted for?

Hon. Lisa Naylor (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure): I will thank the member opposite for the question. It gives me an opportunity to say what a pleasure it's been meeting with industry around this issue over the last couple of months.

The member may not be aware, as I know he is new to the Legislature, that this bill passed with the intention that significant pieces would be passed in regulation, and that is the ongoing work that is happening right now.

The Speaker: The honourable member for La Vérendrye, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Narth: That's exactly what we're here wondering: When this is going to happen?

Delayed payments to construction companies can lead to unneeded financial strain, stress to owners and workers and even business closures and loss of jobs. This legislation affects the livelihood of thousands of Manitobans, and this NDP caucus supported it. But maybe that shouldn't be of any surprise. We know that the NDP's record on paying their suppliers isn't that great.

Why are we delaying the regulations and consultations that are required to enact this legislation? When will these steps be taken?

MLA Naylor: Thank you again, for that question.

Of all the questions I thought I might have today, this wasn't one of them. But I'm happy to let you know that you're absolutely right—absolutely right—that the NDP supported the builder liens amendment act. There is—was consent on this side of the House. That act received assent on May 30, and it will come into force when regulations are enacted, and anyone on that side of the House who was involved in this understands that this is a significant legal process. There are many, many legal details that will be captured in regulations, and that is exactly what our team has been working on.

The Speaker: The honourable member for La Vérendrye, on a final supplementary question.

Mr. Narth: That's what I'm up here asking is, on behalf of constituents of mine and all Manitobans, including the construction companies that represent infrastructure development in our province.

And I'll say, in a letter from the—or the Winnipeg Construction Association that I'm able to table here today, they outline their concerns regarding prompt

payment delays and their concerns that this NDP government has yet to end the suspension of public construction tendering and is delaying awarding already tendered work.

This is directly leading to layoffs. Manitobans are losing their jobs due to the negligence of this NDP government.

Can the minister please tell the House: Why are they forcing—

The Speaker: Member's time has expired.

MLA Naylor: Again, I will tell the member opposite, you can tell your constituents exactly what I've been telling industry over the last few months: the PC government could not get it done but the NDP government will.

NEEDS Newcomer Services Support for Similar Organizations

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): We are fortunate to have organizations like NEEDS support our newcomer children and youth. It is one of the only centres in Canada offering these services.

I want to ask our Premier (Mr. Kinew): How does he plan to support groups like NEEDS and all the good work that they do for new Manitobans?

Hon. Malaya Marcelino (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Thank you, member opposite, for your question.

It was just—my great pleasure to meet for the first time, Monica [*phonetic*], from—the leader from NEEDS in a meeting a couple of months ago. As the new minister, I hadn't heard of their programming yet and it was just really mind-blowing to see the kind of good that they're doing in this community, especially for so many refugee children and families across our province and in the city of Winnipeg.

And it is our pleasure to be able to come up with new settlement services and settlement funding that will be introduced in this coming budget on April 2.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Tyndall Park, on a supplementary question.

Professional Development for Staff

MLA Lamoureux: With an average of 2,000 newcomers being supported each year, NEEDS provides important skills training to youth, to help them integrate into Canadian society.

The NEEDS staff come from a variety of backgrounds: many are social workers, teachers and early childhood educators.

What is this minister's plan to ensure professional development opportunities are available for all educators who want to develop their skills to better serve our youth?

MLA Marcelino: Thank you to the member opposite for their very, very important question.

Part of our mandate here in this government is to really transform what we can do for newcomers because we know what a vital role they play in our economy and in the vitality of communities across Manitoba.

One of the things that we're going to be really, really keen on doing is making sure that barriers to accreditation—unfair barriers to accreditation are going to be removed. We've made a lot of steps forward on this already in such a short time, especially as it relates to regulations for English language requirements from different regulatory colleges. And this is online right now for review for members opposite, if they'd like to take a look.

But again, most of the funding for new settlement services that are going to be coming up—come in the budget are going to be about adult education, about English language classes and also jobs and skills training; things that we know that newcomers need—

The Speaker: The member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Tyndall Park, on a final supplementary question.

Youth Mental Health Strategy Implementation Timeline

MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): NEEDS staff provide education and integration services for new Manitoban youth from all around the world. While the needs from child to child might differ, one common issue for youth are mental health challenges.

NEEDS staff are often called upon to help youth with psychological supports. This is an area where they can certainly be better supported by the Province.

When can Manitobans expect this government to unveil its youth mental health strategy?

Hon. Bernadette Smith (Minister responsible for Mental Health): I was very honoured to attend the NEEDS dinner and I want to uplift the work that

they're doing and assure them that we are doing a lot of work on youth mental health.

And there is a lot of work that is still yet to be done and I want to let the member know that, April 2, to stay tuned to our budget, and also that there's been a lot of work that has been rolled out already, in terms of wait times, letting—making sure that those are—kids are getting access to mental health services sooner; in terms of, like, calls to make sure that they're not waiting to get into services, so that they have access to someone sooner.

And I know—

The Speaker: The member's time has expired.

* (15:00)

French Language Services Government Initiatives

MLA Robert Loiselle (St. Boniface): C'est aujourd'hui la Journée internationale de la Francophonie. Après des années de coupures, les francophones ont enfin un gouvernement qui s'engage à faire en sorte que leur culture, leur langue et leurs droits soient reconnus et protégés dans cette province.

La première loi adoptée par ce gouvernement a été de reconnaître Louis Riel en tant que premier Premier ministre du Manitoba. Il a également augmenté le financement du bureau de l'Éducation française et a rétabli le poste de sous-ministre adjoint, supprimé par les Conservateurs.

Le ministre responsable des Affaires francophones peut-il dire à la Chambre ce que fait ce gouvernement pour s'assurer que les francophones ont accès à des services en français au Manitoba en ce jour de la francophonie international?

Translation

Today is the International Day of the Francophonie. After years of cuts, Francophones finally have a government that is committed to ensuring that their culture, their language and their rights are recognised and protected in this province.

The first legislation passed by this government was to recognize Louis Riel as Manitoba's first Premier. Our government also increased funding for the Bureau de l'éducation française and reinstated the position of assistant deputy minister, which had been removed by the Conservatives.

Can the Minister responsible for Francophone Affairs tell the House what this government is doing to ensure

that Francophones have access to services in French in Manitoba on this International Day of the Francophonie?

Hon. Glen Simard (Minister responsible for Francophone Affairs): J'aimerais remercier mon collègue, le député de Saint-Boniface, pour cette question.

Ça commence avec l'écoute.

Translation

I would like to thank my colleague, the MLA for St. Boniface, for this question.

It starts with listening.

English

It starts with listening.

Et c'est ça ce qu'on a—notre gouvernement a fait. Nous avons rétabli le ADM chez le BÉF. Nous allons continuer d'investir dans nos écoles.

Juste aujourd'hui, le ministre de Justice a parlé de cinq choses que nous allons faire pour soulever les services en français dans les affaires juridiques.

Nous allons continuer d'investir.

Translation

This is what our government has done. We reinstated the ADM position within the BEF (Bureau de l'éducation française), and we will continue to invest in our schools.

Just today, the Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe) talked about five things we will be doing to increase French services in legal matters.

We will continue to invest.

English

We will continue to invest.

Nous allons continuer d'écouter.

Translation

We will continue to listen.

English

We will continue to listen.

Et j'aimerais utiliser les mots de mon collègue, le ministre infrastructure et transport : « Where they didn't get it done, we will ».

Translation

And I would like to use here the words of my colleague, the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: "Where they didn't get it done, we will."

**Night Hunting Practices
Government Position**

Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River): Yes, Honourable Speaker, the dangerous practice of night lighting is unsafe and unethical. It eliminates fair chase and puts human lives, property and livestock at risk.

What is the Minister of Economic Development and Natural Resources' stance on this dangerous practice?

Hon. Jamie Moses (Minister of Economic Development, Investment, Trade and Natural Resources): Honourable Speaker, I just want to be clear: our government's top priority is around safety for all Manitobans.

And I understand the rhetoric and the narrative that the member brings is a divisive one. That's the same narrative that they brought throughout the entire campaign—of a divisive one.

We want to talk about these issues, bringing Manitobans together. We don't want to pit people against each other. And that's the sort of unity we're going to bring when we're dealing with Manitobans from all walks of life.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Swan River, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Wowchuk: Will the minister confirm today if he will continue to support the enforcement of night lighting to protect human lives, livestock and property?

Mr. Moses: Honourable Speaker, we're about safety. We're about safety for Manitobans.

But let's look at their record when it came to dealing with natural resources here. They left conservation officers positions vacant right across the province, they cut the environmental inspectors right in half and they continue with their message of division for Manitobans, putting one Manitoban against the other in the Chamber today.

We saw it all throughout the campaign. We took a different path, Manitobans took a path—different path—when they chose us in October to be the government.

The Speaker: The honourable member for Swan River, on a final supplementary question.

Mr. Wowchuk: Honourable Speaker, will this minister—I'll make this one simple.

Will this minister support all measures presently in place to support existing legislation for this dangerous practice of night lighting, yes or no?

Mr. Moses: Honourable Speaker, I've been very clear that our priority is about safety for all Manitobans. We'll continue to do that every single day.

Instead of putting one Manitoban against another and using divisive rhetoric, the same rhetoric they used in the campaign, that they continue into the Chamber today, we want Manitobans to know that safety is top of our priority list, and we're going to build a Manitoban that works for all of us.

The Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

PETITIONS

Removal of Federal Carbon Tax

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The federal government has mandated a consumption-based carbon tax with the stated goal of financially pressuring Canadians to make decisions to reduce their carbon emissions.

(2) Manitoba Hydro estimates that, even with a high-efficiency furnace, the carbon tax is costing the average family over \$200 annually, even more for those with older furnaces.

(3) Home heating in Manitoba is not a choice or a decision for Manitobans to make, it is a necessity of life, with an average of almost 200 days below 0°C annually.

(4) The federal government has selectively removed the carbon tax off of home heating oil in the Atlantic provinces of Canada but has indicated they have no intention to provide the same relief to Manitobans heating their homes.

(5) Manitoba Hydro indicates that natural gas heating is one of the most affordable options available to Manitobans, and it can be cost prohibitive for households to replace their heating source.

(6) Premiers across Canada, including in the Atlantic provinces that benefit from this decision, have collectively sent a letter to the federal government calling on it to extend the carbon tax exemption to all

forms of home heating with the exception of Manitoba.

(7) Manitoba is one of the only provincial jurisdictions to have not agreed with the stance that all Canadians' home heating bills should be exempt from the carbon tax.

(8) Provincial leadership in other jurisdictions have already committed to removing the federal carbon tax from home heating bills.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to remove the federal carbon tax on home heating bills for all Manitobans to provide them much-needed relief.

This petition is signed by Barry Schmidtke, G.A. Corbett, John Niemczyk and many, many other fine Manitobans.

The Speaker: Further petitions?

ORDERS OF THE DAY GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader): I move, seconded by—oh, geez, sorry. Sorry.

Honourable Speaker, can you please call second reading of Bill 8, The Safe Access to Abortion Services Act; followed by the second reading of Bill 9, The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act.

The Speaker: It has been announced that we will—that the government has called for second reading of Bill 8, the safe access to abortion act; followed by debate on Bill 9, The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act.

SECOND READINGS

Bill 8—The Safe Access to Abortion Services Act

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister responsible for Women and Gender Equity): I move, seconded by the Minister of Health, that Bill 8, The Safe Access to Abortion Services Act, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Miigwech.

Motion presented.

MLA Fontaine: In Canada and in Manitoba, governments have a fundamental responsibility to citizens to ensure they have access to the services that they are lawfully entitled to.

* (15:10)

Further, access to abortions is a matter of human rights. Governments have an obligation to provide access to abortion services as part of their core human rights responsibilities to their citizens.

In this light, Bill 8 ensures all Manitobans have the right to access abortion services as essential reproductive health services without fear of being intimidated or obstructed by anti-choice protesters.

Honourable Speaker, this legislation is far, far overdue. Several anti-choice groups operate in Manitoba. I won't name them, but members of these groups typically identify sites for demonstrations. They station themselves outside the entrance to a clinic or health facility and target people who are there to access reproductive health services.

The protesters, contrary to what they try to present, often use aggressive and sometimes violent actions to intimidate, shock and bully citizens who are trying to access abortion services. This includes displaying graphic images, verbal harassment and getting in the way to block people from going through the doors and, at times, attempting to physically stop them from entering and accessing health care.

Anti-choice protesters have also resorted to the tactic of taking pictures of citizens entering or leaving a clinic. Photographing people accessing health care without their consent in these 'caeshes' is a patent violation of patient confidentiality.

Demonstrators have also targeted citizens who are accessing reproductive health services on the mistaken assumption that they are accessing abortion services. For those citizens accessing and experiencing difficulties with fertility, miscarriages and stillbirth, being bombarded with graphic images and insensitive comments can needlessly exacerbate their trauma.

And I cannot tell the House how many individuals, how many Manitobans and certainly how many Canadians have approached me over the years to share their heartbreaking stories of trying to access health care and to be assaulted with such imagery from anti-choice, and the further trauma that it contributed to them.

No one should be subjected to intimidation or invasion of privacy based on their personal choice to access a safe and legal health service. Bill 8 is intended to protect the safety and privacy of all citizens who seek abortion services and also those on

the front lines who provide services and generally to safeguard the right of access to reproductive health services.

I just want to take a quick moment to say miigwech to all of those that are on the front lines offering abortion services. Your care and attention and expertise is invaluable and so appreciated on this side of the House.

The proposed legislation achieves this by establishing a legislated injunction against protests in the form of automatic buffer zones around clinics whose primary purpose is to provide abortion services. Buffer zones will act as safety parameters that prohibit attempts to intimidate, persuade or harass people.

Currently there are two sites where clinics would be entitled to an automatic buffer zone. Other facilities, such as hospitals, pharmacies, doctors' offices and health-care facilities that provide surgical or medical abortion services will have the option of requesting a buffer zone by applying for a zone for their site through regulations. There are at least five health-care facilities in Winnipeg and Brandon that could potentially request a buffer zone through regulations under Bill 8.

Bill 8 further protects the people who work in clinics through the creation of an automatic buffer zone around their homes. This is particularly important as extremist anti-abortion violence has been targeted against abortion service providers. It is well known that a Winnipeg abortion provider was shot in his home in 1997.

The proposed bill also provides regulatory authority to prescribe buffer zones for the residences of other classes of persons who work in facilities that provide abortion services. The buffer zone will, in effect, keep anti-choice protesters away from directly confronting citizens who are accessing clinics and facilities on site and from directly confronting the providers of abortion services at their homes.

Within a buffer zone, demonstrators will be prohibited from advertising or persuading or trying to persuade a person not to access abortion services. Protesters will be barred from informing or trying to inform persons about abortion issues or to express acts of disapproval related to abortion. Demonstrators will not be allowed to pester citizens about accessing abortion services or to demand providers stop providing those health-care services. Protesters will not be permitted to monitor or physically interfere with anyone who is going in or out of a clinic or facility or

to intimidate or try to intimidate them by—including making loud noises or to photograph, film or otherwise graphically record patients or providers. Finally, protesters will be prohibited from harassing providers through repeated unwanted communications by phone, fax or other electronic means.

Prohibiting such behaviour within a buffer zone will have the benefit of safeguarding patients' health by reducing the real risks of complications resulting from anxiety and emotional distress that may result from the presence of protesters.

As well, the threat of anti-choice activities can deter clinicians from offering abortion services, which directly affects accessibility for Manitobans. By protecting them from harassment and potential violence, access-zone legislation can support physicians in their decision to provide abortion services and help improve availability for their patients.

Another benefit is that clinics and health-care facilities and the homes of service providers will be better protected against destruction and vandalism. The zones will also reduce traffic problems and hazards around protected sites and reduce the risk of accidents.

Prohibiting unnecessarily loud noises will help foster community peace by removing this from a neighbourhood's nuances.

Finally, by sending a clear message that no person will be deprived of their legal right to access reproductive health services, Bill 8 can potentially reduce anti-choice violence and harassment by lowering the levels and impact of aggressive anti-choice activism at clinics and facilities. There is a strong legal precedent for legislation providing buffer zones to ensure access to abortion services, as this type of legislation already exists across the country in six provinces.

British Columbia's law, which was the first in Canada, has been in place for almost 20 years. British Columbia's legislation, which is similar to Bill 8, has been thoroughly tested by legal challenges. A series of BC court rulings found that protecting access to abortion as a health service outweighs the infringement of section 2 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, relating to freedom of religion, thought, belief and expression.

Manitoba's proposed Safe Access to Abortion Services Act is modelled closely on other provinces' laws, particularly Ontario's legislation, which has also

withstood Charter challenges and otherwise have not lent themselves to challenge.

* (15:20)

The Department of Families has consulted extensively with Constitutional Law review branch of Legal Services throughout the development of Bill 8 to ensure the bill is workable, enforceable and justifiable.

I have already described the pressing need for this legislation as we see evidence of protests and harassment directly against citizens at clinics, and even outside of clinics if you're even just at a conference. Bill 8 is therefore fully justified in placing a reasonable limit on the right of freedom and expression in buffer zones.

I would also note Bill 8, in focussing on prohibiting intimidation and harassment of—in buffer zones, impairs the Charter's right of freedom of expression as little as reasonably as possible. To emphasize this point, the proposed legislation does not prohibit the right to protest against government policy on abortion. We are not infringing on the right to protest, except in buffer zones.

I appreciate that anti-choice protesters may be loud and disruptive in trying to get their point across. That is the whole point of protests, that they're trying to get public attention. Anti-choice activists will be free to protest outside of buffer zones. They are welcome to gather and take their anti-choice fight to the Legislative building as I have said many, many years, to express their views to the members of this House, which is where said protests should be directed, and not at citizens accessing health care.

Anti-choice protesters are also free to engage in media campaigns to sway public support on the right to access abortion services, although polls have consistently shown the majority of the Canadian public are satisfied with the country's abortion policies.

That is their democratic right, and the exercise of their right to protest to change policy and legislation is essential to the health and—healthy functioning of a democratic society.

Manitobans have the right to access whatever health care they need and deem appropriate for their own bodies. Bill 8 takes a reasonable approach in limiting the right to freedom of expression in buffer zones. It ensures the protection of the rights of Manitobans to freely, respectfully and safely access

abortion services in confidentiality, whether or not protesters agree with it.

As I have said many times, Honourable Speaker, abortion is health care, and if there are citizens that don't agree with abortion, I would encourage them not to have one, but certainly not to infringe their own beliefs and views on the rights of other Manitobans.

Miigwech.

Questions

The Speaker: A question period of up to 15 minutes will be held. Questions may be addressed to the minister by any opposition or independent member in the following sequence: first question by the official opposition critic or designate; subsequent questions asked by critics or designates from other recognized opposition parties; subsequent questions asked by each independent member; remaining questions asked by any opposition member. And no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): Can the minister just outline, what are some of the penalties outlined in the bill for contravening the legislation, and how does it compare to similar penalties in other jurisdictions?

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister responsible for Women and Gender Equity): Miigwech for the question.

For the first offence, penalties can include a fine of up to \$5,000 and up to six months imprisonment, or both. For a second or subsequent offence, penalties can include a fine of up to \$10,000 or up to one year in prison, or both.

These penalties are similar to those in place in BC, Alberta, Ontario, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West): My question for the minister revolves around The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act of Manitoba and also of Canada.

So, you speak about a buffer zone around a care provider's home. They would have to reveal their personal information, including their address, for that.

How would we address this in legislation to make sure that their fundamental rights under The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act is met?

MLA Fontaine: Miigwech to the member for the question.

Certainly nobody on—government is going to be publicly disclosing the addresses of abortion providers. That's the antithesis to what this bill would protect.

And so I don't think that there's a concern of that, that this government will in any way, shape or form provide the addresses for abortion providers.

Mr. Grant Jackson (Spruce Woods): I thank the minister for the question.

I agree with her comments, certainly, that, you know, protesting at these types of facilities is not appropriate. In fact, I feel that way about all health-care facilities. I have a parent in their 70s who I came home from being in here and found injured and had to take to the emergency room. Can't imagine having to push my way through a protest to get that parent the health care that they needed at that time, regardless of what the protest was about.

So my question to the minister is, I agree that all protests—this is the place for them, here. Why would this legislation not be comprehensive and include all health-care facilities?

MLA Fontaine: I think that we—and I appreciate the—what the member shared. I think that we saw that—I believe that was, like, in September of 2021, I believe, or maybe it was September of 2020 when we saw protests in front of the HSC from anti-vaxxers protesters.

And I—certainly, I think, most of us in this Chamber would agree that we shouldn't be protesting health-care facilities. And I think the federal government has an enacted legislation that prohibits protesting in front of health-care facilities.

Mrs. Cook: I wasn't clear in reading the legislation. There was some variability in the size of the buffer zones between 50 and 150 metres.

So I just wondered if the minister could clarify which is it, or is it somewhere in between, or how that will be decided, and who will apply—like, if it's in regulation, who's going to administer and apply those regulations.

MLA Fontaine: I appreciate the question from the member opposite.

I think that that's a consequence of just the physical space of hospitals and clinics and abortion providers' homes. And so it will be a consequence of what that physical space looks like and certainly will be laid out in regulations.

Mr. Balcaen: My question goes on to a statement that the minister just made regarding buffer zones around hospitals. The minister stated that there may be federal legislation that speaks to protests around health-care facilities.

My question is: Why would we need specific legislation if there's already—or, sorry—at the provincial level, when there's already legislation at the federal level?

MLA Fontaine: Miigwech for the question.

In 2022, amendments to Canada's Criminal Code created a specific offence related to intimidating and obstructing health-care workers and patients. They did not include several other protections that are embedded within provincial abortion access zone laws.

The federal law does not establish buffer zones around clinics or the homes. These boundaries are needed to protect the safety, privacy and dignity of health-care providers and patients.

As well, the Criminal Code amendments do not prohibit forms of harassment, such as attempting to influence acts of disapproval, photographing, filming and the assaulting imagery that we see specifically from anti-choice protesters.

So this bill is specifically in response to what we see—

The Speaker: Minister's time has expired.

Mr. Jackson: Thank the minister for her responses.

She mentioned that Bill 8 is closely modelled on British Columbia, and then mentioned a few other provinces that have existing legislation as well.

Just wondering if she can give us some details on the cross-jurisdictional comparisons with those other provinces as well.

* (15:30)

MLA Fontaine: What I can share with the member—I appreciate the question—15 years after BC brought the first access-zone legislation into Canada, a survey of abortion service providers found that protest activity was reduced, and staff and patients alike felt less threatened by protesters.

Similarly, a review of access-zone legislation in Atlantic Canada found that it had been successful.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, following the law's passage, protest activity moved away from

clinics' main access point, and staff and patients reported being less fearful.

So I think across Canada what we're seeing with similar legislation is that it really does create a space where patients and providers are less fearful to do their job or to access health care.

Mrs. Cook: Could the minister indicate which groups she's consulted with in crafting this legislation?

MLA Fontaine: Yes, I appreciate the question.

As I've shared in this House before, this is, you know, the sixth iteration of the bill that I've introduced since 2017. And in that time, over those many, many years, I've had the opportunity to meet with Klinik. I've had the opportunity to meet with the Women's Health Clinic. I've had the opportunity to meet with so many Manitobans that have experienced anti-choice protesters' acts as they've been accessing health care.

And in some cases, as I've shared in this House, you know, I spoke with one individual who was leaving after a stillbirth and was actually harassed by anti-choice protesters. And a lot of the bill has been informed by Manitobans who have experienced this—

The Speaker: Time has expired.

Mr. Balcaen: My question is in regards to consultation as well.

And I'm wondering if the minister has a—has had a chance in her years since 2017 to consult with police—and I'm specifically wondering if you've had a chance to consult with Chief Smyth here in Winnipeg, where the clinics will be in hospital, and Acting Chief Lewis in Brandon, where the Brandon Regional Health Centre is that also performs these duties.

MLA Fontaine: Certainly, over the years I've had many conversations—even well beyond 2017—many conversations with members of different policing institutions in respect of some of the things that we have found as activists trying to protect the right to access abortion care unobstructed and unfettered.

Again, I want to stress that the consultation, or the discussions that I've had in respect of this bill, have really been informed by those that are on the front lines and those that have been impacted in some way, shape or form trying to access abortion services or health care in general.

Mr. Jackson: Recently, there was a—if you follow such things—a decision, or an edict, I guess, from the Pope, whatever the proper terminology is, about

fertility treatments for parents, which was concerning, I think, to many.

And so just a question to the minister: Does this apply to fertility clinics as well? Did I miss that in the legislation, if it does?

MLA Fontaine: I appreciate that question, and I actually don't have an answer. I will certainly look into that. I think that that's actually pretty reasonable to look into, considering also where we're going, in respect of some folks in the US kind of influencing some of the rhetoric here in Canada.

But I certainly will look into that and get back to the member.

The Speaker: No further questions?

Debate

The Speaker: The floor is open for debate.

Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin): I want to say something immediately on this bill before I get into my critique of the bill itself.

Obviously and unequivocally, abortion services are health-care services. I will not be misquoted on that point; I will not have my words twisted by members opposite. On this point, the Minister of Families (MLA Fontaine) and I agree.

The issues I have with this bill are primarily issues with how the NDP government is failing to govern. Instead of bringing forward a bill that would protect access to medical services for all Manitoba patients, they choose to try and create more and more division amongst Manitobans.

They are choosing one type of demonstration and deciding that that shouldn't happen in front of a health-care facility, and ignoring the many other types of demonstrations that also impede access to health-care facilities.

I will be proposing an amendment to this bill that I expect would have all-party support. We're talking about access to health-care facilities; we're talking about the safety of Manitoba patients and the safety of Manitoba health-care staff.

And, yes, of course, that should apply to a woman going to access reproductive health care at an abortion clinic, but it should also apply to a cancer patient or a sick kid walking into the Children's Hospital. It should apply to a nurse walking into a shift at The Pas. It should apply to a doctor clocking in for surgery at Concordia, or a health-care aide walking into a PCH.

It is clear by the existence of this bill that the federal Criminal Code amendments referenced earlier by the minister are not all-encompassing. And we should not pick winners and losers when it comes to the safety of those who want to access the health-care resources they need and deserve.

We should be protecting access to all health-care facilities for the protection of all Manitoba patients and staff. This is not about politics; this is about patients and staff.

The NDP's playbook might call for putting politics over Manitoba patients, but I disagree. Access to health care is a fundamental Canadian right.

My amendment will achieve the minister's goals to protect the sites explicitly listed in the bill, but it will also ensure all Manitoba patients and all Manitoba health-care staff have a right to access health-care facilities unimpeded.

We can work together to accomplish those goals if the minister chooses to accept this amendment. If the NDP refuse to support this amendment, then I would suggest that for them, the intent of Bill 8 is to engage in wedge politics and limit only the protests that they disagree with. I look forward to all-party support.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Hon. Lisa Naylor (Minister of Consumer Protection and Government Services): I am so grateful to have an opportunity to speak on Bill 8, The Safe Access to Abortion Services Act, and I'm so grateful to the Minister of Families for bringing this bill forward again and again and again and again over the last few years.

Keeping abortion health-care services free from harassment and interference is something that is very close to my heart. Before abortion procedures were decriminalized in 1988, I volunteered as a clinic escort at the Toronto Morgentaler Clinic.

As a young woman, I spent many Saturday mornings meeting patients, sometimes on a sidewalk, sometimes at a nearby safe house, to walk them through throngs of loud, angry protesters who were saying and doing despicable things in order to prevent women from accessing health care.

When I wasn't on a scheduled volunteer shift, I was often called on to join teams of volunteers to literally defend the clinic so that procedures could safely proceed.

Our bodies were the buffer zone between busloads of protesters, sometimes bused across the border from Buffalo, sometimes bused in from nearby Catholic schools as teenagers were brought in as part of their so-called education to prevent women from accessing necessary health care.

A few years before I became a volunteer, the Toronto Morgentaler Clinic was bombed, shutting down services for a period of time and also closing down the bookstore that was located in the same building.

Later, a few years after abortion was decriminalized, the clinic was bombed again, this time levelling it to the ground and threatening many neighbouring businesses and homes. It was clear to me, even as a young woman, that anti-abortion, anti-choice people who don't care about women's health will stop at nothing.

* (15:40)

After moving to Manitoba in 1999, I was soon hired at Women's Health Clinic, where I served in a variety of counselling and health-education roles over two decades. At times, I provided pre- and post-abortion counselling. I also provided reproductive health education.

Over the years, I observed many protesters who would interfere with people's right to choose their own health care and would interfere with people's right to choose when and if to have children. I walked through those protesters just to go to work at our Teen Clinic on Thursday afternoons, which was their favourite time to protest.

On Thursdays, during our Teen Clinic, when teens came to access care for anything: a sore throat, an STI, an eating disorder or, yes, an unplanned pregnancy that they needed help to make a decision on, they would be met with protesters who shamed and attempted to provide erroneous health-care information to them, regardless of their reasons to be at-visiting the clinic.

Likewise, when women arrived for prenatal care or parenting support in our mothers program, they were greeted with the same harassment.

Honourable Speaker, while not every protester is physically violent, their words and images were often violent, and of course we all know that there are seriously violent actions taken by those who would fight against abortion rights.

My friend Lori Johnson was the past director of the Winnipeg Morgentaler Clinic, and at the time that she had three young children, protesters didn't just protest at the clinic, they went to her home and they went to her children's school and they did it multiple times.

In 1994, Dr. Garson Romalis, a Vancouver physician, was shot and survived, only to be stabbed six years later. Both incidents were committed by an anti-abortion perpetrator.

In 1995, Dr. Hugh Short, a doctor providing abortion health care near Hamilton, Ontario, was shot by an anti-abortion perpetrator.

And in 1997, as the Minister of Families (MLA Fontaine) already mention, Dr. Jack Fainman, then head of obstetrics and gynecology at Victoria Hospital, was shot by someone who believed he should not provide abortion care.

All of these attacks were career ending for those esteemed medical professionals. It is clear to me that those who would stop someone from accessing abortion health care will stop at nothing.

Some who gather outside a clinic to harass patients may taunt. They may hold up graphic, inaccurate scientific images and some may even claim to be praying, but others among them will stab, shoot or do whatever they believe they need to do to stop those with uteruses from getting the health care they need and deserve.

When members on the other side of the House, like the previous Health minister, the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen), attended and spoke at anti-choice rallies, that was the company he was keeping.

I will always stand on the side of those seeking abortion care for any reason. I have personally provided pre- and post-procedure counselling even to those who have fought against their own right to have the procedure. Yes, you heard that right: Even those who stand and obstruct abortion clinics sometimes seek abortion services.

Care providers will always continue to act in the best interest of patients, even when put at risk by those seeking to interfere with health care. These care providers, along with their patients, must be kept safe and free of harassment in their workplace.

So I am very grateful to the Minister of Families for, once again, introducing this very important bill. Our NDP government unequivocally believes that all Manitobans seeking abortion have the right to bodily

autonomy and good health care. They have the right to seek this free from harassment. Abortion is health care, and it is our right and access to this health-care right must be protected.

This bill will ensure that people seeking an abortion and the health professionals who offer these services will be free from undue harassment. All Manitobans deserve safe access to reproductive health care, safe from intimidation.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

The Speaker: No other members rising for debate, is the House ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

The Speaker: The honourable member for—*[interjection]*—question before the House is second reading of Bill 8, The Safe Access to Abortion Services Act.

Shall the motion pass? Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? *[Agreed]*

Bill 9—The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act

The Speaker: We will now move to second reading of Bill 9, The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act.

Hon. Malaya Marcelino (Minister of Labour and Immigration): I move, seconded by the Minister of Families (MLA Fontaine), that Bill 9, The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act; Loi modifiant le Code des normes d'emploi, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

MLA Marcelino: It is my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 9, an amendment to the Employment Standards Code to extend the length of the long-term leave for serious illness and injury from 17 weeks to 27 weeks.

In 2022, the federal government made changes to employment insurance and the federal labour legislation as part of broader EI reform. These changes increased EI sickness benefits from 15 to 26 weeks and the maximum length of unpaid medical leave from 17 to 27 weeks for federally regulated employees under the Canada Labour Code.

Long-term leave for serious injury or illness is currently a 17-week unpaid leave in Manitoba. So, to qualify, an employee must be employed by the same employer for at least 90 days, and as a result, Manitoba workers are currently not able to access

enough unpaid protected leave from their jobs to receive the full extended EI benefits.

This bill seeks to align Manitoba with the federal EI sickness benefit period of 27 weeks. The Labour Management Review Committee, or LMRC, recommended government to do this in February 2023.

Our government has made a commitment to treat all workers with dignity and respect. Our government also values the input of trusted Manitobans, and both the employer and labour communities, as well as the Canadian Cancer Society, support this extension to align with full extended EI sickness benefits.

Manitobans should have the supports they need while recovering from an illness or injury. In this amendment, the Employment Standards Code will protect the jobs of Manitobans and ensure workers have the time and flexibility needed for treatment and recovery.

Our government has made a commitment to protect jobs and to always stand up for the rights of working people. This amendment to the code does just that.

* (15:50)

Mr. Tyler Blashko, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

Thank you, Deputy Speaker—Honourable Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to this bill.

Questions

The Deputy Speaker: A question period of up to 15 minutes will be held. Questions may be addressed to the minister by any opposition or independent member in the following sequence: first question by the official opposition critic or designate; subsequent questions asked by critics or designates from other recognized opposition parties; subsequent questions asked by each independent member; remaining questions asked by any opposition members. And no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): I just want to ask the Minister of Labour and Immigration (MLA Marcelino): New Brunswick undertook a lengthy review and consultation period, engaging the public on questions including whether the department should maintain the status quo or make amendments. Can the minister share what was done in Manitoba to engage the public on the change of this legislation?

Hon. Malaya Marcelino (Minister of Labour and Immigration): To this point, the department engaged in a—speaking to the Public Service Commission here to find out what was going to be the impact for the

different government employees and for the Province for how this would relate to staffing issues that might arise. This was also discussed with the Canadian Cancer Society, and this was also done with a review with the Labour Management Review Committee, and they were able to present to the government of the time to go forward with these employment standards amendments.

Thank you.

Mr. Obby Khan (Fort Whyte): Can the minister please clarify when she said that they consulted with labour and businesses, which businesses did they—did she specifically consult with?

MLA Marcelino: The consultations were with the Labour Management Review Committee. Their recommendations were made in February 2023. I was not the minister of Labour at that time. It was given to the previous minister of Labour under the PC government, and the recommendations were made by the Labour Management Review Committee and the composition of those members at that time.

I did check in with the folks currently, and their recommendation still stands, and that was an outstanding duty that was not done by the previous Labour minister. This was—this is usually done when there are employment standards changes on the federal—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The member's time has expired.

MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie): Minister, independent businesses play a big role in our province. What independent businesses or associations have been contacted?

MLA Marcelino: I was not able to contact any of the independent businesses at this time, but there have been no issues that have been raised to me by the federation at this point.

Ms. Byram: What about the people who are just coming off their leave and won't have the option to extend? Is there a grace period or reinstatement of benefit for people who have just recently completed their sick time?

MLA Marcelino: Thank you, Deputy Speaker, and to the member for that question.

If the person is finished their leave, then they would not be able to get another leave for this new fully extended period. If the person was still in the middle of their leave or still in the process of their

leave, they would be able to take on the extended leave in addition to what they currently have.

So it's not retroactive if they've already finished their leave, but if they're still in the middle of whatever leave that they have or how many days left they have, then they can avail of the extended leave. Sorry if it's confusing.

Mr. Khan: Just going to re-read a quote, or reword roughly. The minister said that they hadn't had time to consult with any businesses, but they did consult with the federation.

Is the minister referring to the federation of independent businesses, and if not—or, if so, who did she mean when she said, federation, and what did they have to say?

MLA Marcelino: Thank you to the member opposite for their question.

Yes, that's what I meant. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business. I did not consult with them. We only consulted with the Labour Management Review Committee.

Again, that was—those consultations were done under the previous PC government who received the positive recommendations from LMRC and still didn't do anything with this, even though it's pretty customary to align provincial employment standards' changes with what happens at the federal level. That's usually something that is normally done so that Manitobans would be able to avail of the different kinds of standards and compensation that would be available to them without extra costs to the Province—

The Deputy Speaker: The minister's time has expired.

MLA Bereza: To the minister across, you mentioned that there hasn't been independent businesses that haven't been consulted. What I'm concerned about is the out-of-country businesses, such as Simplot and Roquette. They're going to be affected by this legislation.

What is the government's position if these plants decide to move the province?

The Deputy Speaker: Just a gentle reminder to put questions through the Chair.

MLA Marcelino: So the changes were done federally in 2022. And then in 2023, in February, the Labour Management Review Committee suggested that the province would align itself with those federal changes to employment standards.

And this is what we're trying to do right now so that Manitobans can—who are facing serious injury and serious illness can avail of the EI payments that they've been paying into while they were working.

If those payments are available now from the federal government, why shouldn't Manitobans be able to avail of them? And if there are—

The Deputy Speaker: The minister's time has expired.

Ms. Byram: My question is, the Liberal government has promised to modernize EI. Is the NDP government here in Manitoba considering other changes at this time as well?

MLA Marcelino: No, we don't make any changes to EI. We don't—we're not contemplating any changes to EI.

Mr. Khan: Thank the minister for their answers.

The minister has said numerous times that what happens at the federal level happens at the provincial level.

Can the minister say today, has any other province followed suit and put forward a bill to increase to 27 weeks, as this minister and this NDP government are doing?

MLA Marcelino: Yes. Currently, Quebec offers the 26 weeks of unpaid sick leave, and Ontario is currently doing their consultations so that—and are expecting to also be able to put forward a similar employment standards amendment. They're currently reviewing this process and we're expecting them to also move forward on this important change.

An Honourable Member: They are not.

MLA Marcelino: No? Okay.

MLA Bereza: Minister, can you tell me what the AMM's position is on this bill and when were they consulted, as this will affect many communities throughout Manitoba?

* (16:00)

MLA Marcelino: I did not consult with AMM on this bill. But normally, you know, I've just been doing this for a few months, but when there's bills that are in contention, people are very, very loud and will want to meet with you, and will want to write you letters, and will want to go forward and let you know what their concerns are.

And guess what? My door is open. I have a phone. I can talk to these folks. We are actually going to be

seeing them on Wednesday coming up, and I'm happy to discuss this bill with anybody with any kind of valid concerns. Not hypothetical ones, but with real ones.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes left of questions and it would be great if all questions come through the Chair.

Ms. Byram: Thank you again to the minister for her response.

I just want to ask, will this have a negative impact on staff retention or labour-force numbers for businesses?

MLA Marcelino: Okay, thank you Deputy Speaker, and to the member opposite for that question.

Again, this is for folks who are facing serious illness. Okay? Serious illness, not, you know, colds or anything like that, but serious illness or very serious injury. So the fact that they have to send a medical note to get this approval federally with their EI.

But this isn't just for, you know, run-of-the-mill kinds of, you're not feeling well. This is for serious illness and injury for longer term folks that need help with what they're going through. And the federal government has been extending their EI coverage, and it's actually a shame that Manitoba did not do this earlier for Manitobans who were facing these kinds of problems, and instead of being able to access—

The Deputy Speaker: The minister's time has expired.

Mr. Khan: It's interesting to know that 90 per cent of Manitoba workplaces fall under the Manitoba employee-employment standards act. And yet the minister says she hasn't had time to meet with AMM, to meet with CFIB or to meet with any other businesses.

The minister did say that if they have concerns, they brought them forward, they would listen. So I'll ask the minister today: If businesses and members bring their concerns forward at committee, will the minister amend this bill to reflect their needs?

MLA Marcelino: Well, I would hope to be able to meet with people before committee when people are drafting amendments. Like, we have to be able to carefully consider and be thoughtful when we're making legislation. So I would hope that if there are folks that the member is saying that would like to meet with me, that they help make those types of arrangements.

But to this date, this member has not done so. So I'm waiting; I can continue to meet with people. And yes, my door is always open, especially to AMM and to CFIB.

Thank you.

MLA Bereza: I'm wondering—we've heard now that a number of independent businesses haven't been consulted, AMM hasn't been consulted, her door is always open. I'm wondering if—I'm hoping you can give us some information on what the Quebec—you said that Quebec and Ontario have passed this. What has the Quebec experience been?

MLA Marcelino: I'm just trying to check in my—thank you, Honourable Speaker.

I'm just trying to check to see how long Quebec has had this for. But I know that they've had this for a longer time, that they've had job-protected leave that would provide 26 weeks to match the federal changes. They've had this for a longer time.

Ontario still hasn't enacted it, so they're still in the process of their consultations. But no, I don't know exactly what the member means by, what has Quebec's experience been? And, again, yes, I am open to meeting with AMM if they have issues with this particular concern. I am going to be there for the next AMM meetings, and I am in regular contact with folks in different municipalities, a lot more than former Cabinet ministers, apparently.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Mr. Khan: Can the minister please—she says she's met with the labour management review, and this is the review—and this is the recommendation going forward, so the minister would have some numbers. Does the minister have what the numbers of the potential costs of what this will be to businesses in Manitoba if the extension is down from 17 weeks to 27 weeks.

MLA Marcelino: I have information here that there will be no costs to us for our provincial Treasury.

But for the businesses, this is what businesses and government and employees themselves pay into EI over time. And, again, this is only for folks who have been able to provide a medical note due to serious injury and to serious illness.

If the members opposite have a huge problem with this, okay. I'd like to hear about, perhaps, why

and maybe consider what they have to say in their debates going forward.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The question period has taken place.

Debate

The Deputy Speaker: So, we will move on to debate.

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): I also want to say thank you to the Minister of Labour and Immigration (MLA Marcelino) for the briefings that I've had on the Bill 7, The Public Sector Construction Projects (Tendering) Repeal Act; Bill 17, The Workplace Safety and Health Amendment Act; and on Bill 9, The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act. And this one, of course, being the one that I am pleased to stand and say a few words on here today and get on the record in respect of this particular bill.

We are very fortunate here in Manitoba. We have employment and opportunity all around our great, beautiful province. One could say it's a bit of a gold mine for job seekers. Almost everywhere you look, you're sure to see help signs posted in windows of businesses, online job ads and a quick Google search can illustrate just how many openings and job selections are readily available in today's world and in our province.

Many have come to our great country seeking the perfect job in hopes of creating a better life for themselves and their families. We can go back years ago and learn the history of many families whose origins started in another country but sought refuge here in Canada and specifically Manitoba.

Not much has really changed in reason for many to immigrate to our country. What we saw back then still continues as we are here today, with people fleeing war-torn countries. We have the freedom to work here. There are people seeking life-changing opportunity with education and career options. We offer so much in Canada, and here in Manitoba, where it is the perfect place to live, raise a family and grow old.

Today, we are fortunate in Canada, where employment offers so much in professional growth and development. Many employers are providing an inclusive work environment with a work-life balance approach. This is what today's employees are seeking, and a desire—a balance between both.

We all want to enjoy spending time with friends and family and not always have the pressure of work

and the stress that may go along with a work schedule. Time is very precious for today's families, and we all need to embrace those special moments and enjoy making every moment a memorable one.

Here in Manitoba, we have the equal opportunity to work and have gainful employment and equal access to job offers. Employment provides necessary income for individuals and provides for one's self and/or families. But aside from providing the monetary value of employment, an individual can gain so much more than just the income alone. Employment gives one a sense of pride. To do a great job, not only does it serve the employer, but it builds self-esteem and a sense of accomplishment for the employee.

* (16:10)

We all know the feeling one gets when we hear those words: you did a great job. It makes one feel good to be recognized for such. Doing a great job often means making a difference, not only in one's personal life, but touching the lives of others and making an impact on those around us. It doesn't matter how small the task or how big the job, everyone matters.

I remember my first job in Neepawa. I was a young teenager and so eager and happy to be taking on a part-time job. This job was cleaning the local movie theatre known as the Roxy Theatre, which, in the early years, was originally built as an opera house, but became the local movie place.

And over the years, many things have been replaced and upgraded and now provides a seating capacity of around 300 on the floor and about 140 to 150 seating available in the balcony. It is now a designated historical theatre in the town and one of the oldest but most beautiful venues in rural Manitoba and now operated by a board of volunteers.

Now, given the age of this historical building, there were many little things that could put fear in my young mind. I remember opening the door to the place and sometimes locking behind me to ensure there could be no other intruders that randomly joined me or invited themselves in. Just walking in alone to this vast, dark, creaking, very old building built fear inside my young mind before I even started my cleaning tasks. In the darkness, I would find my way to the light switch and head into the theatre and turn on every other light switch I could find before I gave myself too much time to be scared, build anxiety and freak out.

I would spend hours cleaning once or twice a week. I always enjoyed the challenge and faced my

fears. I often had to go to the dark, dreaded basement to retrieve additional lighting so that I could see down each aisle and between the rows of the theatre seating. I would carry the heavy metal lights and stand up the stairs—and head up the stairs when I had to. I would carry up the spiral staircase to the balcony, and at the top, I'd catch my breath and plug in the light, start sweeping up the popcorn and then carry the huge shop vac up the same spiral staircase to vacuum; and then the same with the mop and pail to do the mopping between the seats. Cleaning the balcony was always a dreaded task and workout. It did give me a great sense of pride knowing I did it on my own and did it well and was always told what a great job I did.

Once the cleaning was completed, I would then have to turn that heavy dreaded light—or have to return that heavy dreaded light back to where I found it, in the basement. I would be thrilled to find tips of quarters and loonies on the floor or jammed in the seats. This always made me feel like I hit the jackpot.

Now, this job as a young person was not a glamorous job nor was it one of great social interaction with my peers. I worked on my own and set my own schedule. That first job provided me with a little spending money, but what it really taught me was so much more. It taught me responsibility, a sense of pride knowing I did the best I could and a sense of satisfaction that I performed all these duties on my own. I was grateful to have been hired, had earned the trust of those that hired me and built self-confidence, an important thing for a young teen. No matter one's age, employment is an opportunity to grow from and one that every person has the right to experience.

Another employment opportunity I had as a young adult was enumeration. Now, that was a very interesting and somewhat challenging job in rural Manitoba. This included a lot of driving and knocking on doors, not much different from campaigning, and we all know that campaigning is long hours, a lot of investment and work.

Taking on this job, I was tasked with visiting homes, gathering personal information on residents and filing their paperwork. This job was an interesting one as it gave me insight to people's lives to a certain degree, but most interesting was the lives of our seniors, those seniors that were still living in their own homes independently. And what really struck me was how lonely it can be and how vulnerable some of our seniors are in our province of Manitoba.

There were questions to answer on the forms that I was handing out, and I often would hear many

seniors requesting help because they had difficulty reading, had no family or support to assist with this paperwork. It made me realize at a young age how our society is quick to forget and leave out those that might take a bit of extra time to help, or those that are vulnerable and need our patience and compassion.

Employment is an important part of most everyone's life. It provides income to support our most essential needs in our day-to-day life and provide for the extra amenities to our families—for our families. Work life is important for most.

It doesn't matter what the profession is or what the job title is, or the task that you're hired for, whether it be on the front line; serving in retail; providing care to the ill or the most vulnerable; keeping our streets clear of snow and debris; ensuring our storefronts and office spaces are clean and tidy; making science better in the laboratories; sending rockets off to space. The list is never-ending.

Every job is an opportunity to serve, to grow, to make a difference and contribute to today's society. Our province of Manitoba, our country, Canada, is waiting for many of these opportunities to be filled. Our country, and even more so globally, we are all experiencing many labour-related challenges.

There are many contributing factors to the challenges that many employers are facing. Some of these factors include rising inflation, retaining and recruiting skilled employees and an aging workforce.

With all these factors playing a part in the shortfall of the labour force, this means disruption to goods and services, posing bigger obstacles to businesses and business growth and the economy.

With so many labour challenges and difficult circumstances already existing in the work floor—workforce and our economy, I have to ask, what does Bill 9 extending Manitoba's protective leave to 27 weeks look like for the employers?

This could potentially leave a vacancy in a business for a further extended period of time, or perhaps permanently if not filled due to unqualified applicants or access to skilled labour to fill that gap. With the lack of experienced applicants for some positions, this could have a negative impact on the selection process and lead to a less experienced worker.

* (16:20)

Less experienced workers on the front line could add extra stress on the business or, depending on the job, could pose for more accidents and possibly a

hindrance and have negative impact on front-line service and the customer or production and the consumer. With staff shortages, this might mean that proper training could be neglected and employees may not get proper instruction on many levels, and that can impact product service and delivery as well as consumer satisfaction.

Whatever the work, job or task is, and if the business already has a staff shortage, there will be this added stress. With existing staff shortages comes extra stress and burden on co-workers, leading to an unhealthy work environment. An employer may find it very difficult to hire someone for just a short term. This extended benefit puts pressure on businesses and contractors, and this is an unnecessary burden. Part-time workers are not always inclined to apply for short-term employment opportunities. This, too, adds more difficulty and strain to the system.

Given the extra demands these put on businesses and industry, it poses risk and forces the employer to make decisions that may impact future growth and expansion of the business. Some may have to consider all options and make harsh business decisions that impact families' livelihoods of those in the area.

There are so many businesses in our province ranging in size: many small business operations and so many large corporate and industry business. We want an economy in Manitoba that calls for investment from right across the world. There are many businesses in Agassiz, and let me talk a little bit about some of those.

I'm very proud to say that in Agassiz constituency alone, we have significant industry and investment that contributes greatly to our local economy. We have many small businesses in the communities and also larger industries, such as HyLife and Farmery in Neepawa; McCain's in Carberry; Parrish and Heimbecker in Gladstone and Rathwell; Smile Pinoy Foods in Gladstone; Shur-Gro in Westbourne; Rosehill Woodcrafters in McGregor; Treherne Pharmacy and Metcalfe garage in Treherne.

And these, Honourable Deputy Speaker, are just a few of the great businesses and industries in the area. There are many, many more. These businesses have helped grow Manitoba's economy by attracting people from all over Canada and the world. Many people from the Philippines, for example, have moved to Manitoba seeking employment at one of these companies, HyLife, which employees over 350 people.

Many of these newcomers reside in Neepawa, Gladstone, Plumas or other neighbouring communities, but all have chosen to make Manitoba their new home. These employees and community newcomers are invested in the town they reside in. They are here to gain employment and add to the workforce. Many also participate in volunteerism throughout their community or organizations, all while providing for their families and contribute greatly to the diverse cultures of Manitoba.

In the town of Carberry there is McCain's and, again, a large industry employing around 300 individuals. Manitoba Starch is also located in Carberry and has about 30 employees. And, of course, these businesses obviously build off the agriculture industry and potato producers in Agassiz. We have seen this industry, in particular, expand. These businesses—excuse me—these businesses also grow Manitoba's economy by being large producers and exporters of agricultural goods. For example, HyLife pork is being consumed on the other side of the world, in Japan and China. And the local Farmery brewery has managed to infiltrate the beer market in Ontario.

These businesses have therefore not only kept us fed here in Manitoba, but around Canada and the world. They put us on the map and contribute to our continued economic and population growth as more and more exports are produced, and as more and more people from other countries seek employment opportunities and a new life here in Manitoba.

I'm also very proud to say that right in my hometown of Neepawa, there's a new nurse training program that's being offered by Assiniboine Community College. This program is educating 20 of Manitoba's future nurses, which everyone knows we are in desperate need of.

A new hospital is also being built in Neepawa, which, as long as we can recruit and retain the staff for it, it will provide high-quality care to the residents of my constituency, as well as other Manitobans who might need it.

It's my hope that in the coming days, the NDP will provide Manitobans with an actual plan for how Manitoba will get these doctors and nurses. It's great that they've been listening to their concerns, but that alone is not enough to improve our health-care system.

I would also like to point out that there are and have been many major infrastructure projects under way across our province, but one has to ask what this would look like in the future with the introduction of

Bill 7, the public sector construction projects tendering act.

I'll remind everyone that the PC government passed Bill 13, The Public Sector Construction Projects (Tendering) Act, in 2021, and that legislation provided a level playing field to all bidders, regardless of the labour relations model they used. It allowed for equal access to government projects.

The NDP's newly introduced bill can change that again, affecting many businesses and business opportunities. Prior to 2021, many small and medium-sized businesses had been negatively affected by unionization. Unfortunately, our world and our lives are not always perfect, and sickness can strike any time and, sometimes, very unknowingly when we least expect it.

As humans, we are all subject to illness at times, been troubled and stressed with life changes and challenges, infected with a virus or living with and treated for a chronic condition or, for some, a cancer diagnosis. Having to temporarily leave your job due to a serious illness can be incredibly and financially stressful. I understand that.

Sadly, it is a reality that many Manitobans must face each and every day. I send well wishes and thoughts to those who are struggling with a serious illness or injury, and I wish those going through treatments and recovery all the best for a journey of wellness and healing.

Treating an illness or health condition takes time, and the healing can be long and painful. Not every person or condition can have the same prescription with the same outcome in terms of timeline and treatment. People deserve fair compensation when dealing with health-care stress. A financial situation should not be an additional burden.

* (16:30)

I have to ask the question as to why this government is quick to push this through. Have they done solid consultation with employers and what true consequence do business and industry see if benefits were to be extended?

This bill will potentially exasperate existing abuse or health-care benefits without proper monitoring. There are some individuals who will seek extended health benefits although their condition has been treated and they are well enough to return to work. This could become a burden to health-care providers and facilities.

Some individuals will seek time from health-care providers, requesting further extension of their sick time, even though it may be best that the worker return to work. This situation puts further pressure on an already-stressed health-care system.

Again, some individuals, although healthy and ready to return to work, may try to seek further evaluation to justify an unnecessary extension of benefits. These individuals will be showing up in clinics, possibly ERs, where we already see resources stretched out and at their maximum threshold. These unnecessary visits can delay timely access for those Manitobans who go to the ER and require the emergent care and need to be the priority patients. We all know that health care here in Manitoba cannot afford to have extra people in waiting rooms.

I understand that serious illness and injury requires a certain amount of recovery time to heal, and in no way am I stating that this is not valid; I'm just simply speaking and bringing forward the reality that it opens up a program where we could see abuse that could cost taxpayers in the long run. I know many who have required a leave from employment due to illness and serious injury. Fortunately, recovery went well and most were able to return to work without requiring extra time or an extended period of time. I also know there are many who would require this extension benefit on their healing and wellness journey while under direction and care of health-care professionals.

The Speaker in the Chair

You know, I believe in having a plan, whether it be long term or short term. But having a plan is key to success. We have yet to see what the NDP plan is. It's been six months and we've not seen a plan.

Where did this government gather their information on this? Was there any public consultation encouraging public input on the change to legislation?

I realize the government wants to align with the federal employment insurance sickness period and benefit plan, but I believe the federal government conducted consultations in preparing for these benefit changes.

Just curious if there were any provincial consultations since that time and, if so, did it include non-union employers and employees? Getting input from all sources and stakeholders is valuable when making decisions that impact the province's entire workforce.

Our world is a changing place. Our communities are becoming much more culturally diversified. Our

population is aging and our family priorities are changing. And, let's face it, the labour workforce has changed and so has the working environment. Both continue to evolve and change, morphing into a new work model in many cases. Many employees have work arrangements, perhaps a hybrid model, or some may work remotely full-time.

With the advancement in technology and a world where family and work-life balance has become priority, this changes our labour market, our work environment and our social interactions.

What about job security? If an employee goes on extended health benefits, they may become concerned about job security. Will they have a job to go back to if granted extra time?

This is a valid concern and one that employees need to know the answer to. I don't believe anybody wants to see those who are fighting a serious illness or injury to face barriers and have added stress.

I do want to say, the employment insurance program is an important benefit to both employees and employers, communities, and, of course, the economic growth of Canada and our great province of Manitoba.

We are a country full of opportunity, with many wanting to come, and many are waiting to stay, to work and play in our great province. Manitoba continues to be an important part of the economic fabric of our wonderful country, and we want to continue to be a leader in business, employment, opportunities and offer equal access—

The Speaker: The member's time is expired.

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): I'm honoured to rise today to speak about Bill 9, The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act. And I'm so proud of my colleague, Minister for Labour and Immigration, who brought this legislation forward.

What this legislation does is that it seeks to align Manitoba with the federal EI sickness benefit period of 27 weeks.

So what I feel about it is that it talks about respecting workers. I have so much respect for workers. I have so much respect for Manitobans, that includes all the workers. And we all work for various employers. And I think all workers, all of us, we need better employment standards. I don't think this is a debate. We all do.

And if we look at our own journeys, when we started, we have been moving from one job to another, to another and another. And I think such kind of positive changes anywhere where we worked or where we want to work have clearly attracted us to those jobs that we preferred over the ones we left.

All this bill says or does is to create a better work environment for the employees, and I think we should look at it this way. We shouldn't look at the situation thinking that party A and party B, party A is happy because they got more days, more weeks. And party B, which is employer, they would be upset because the employee is not returning back.

Well, when we listen to the comments recently made—I have so much respect for my colleague across the aisle—when we start thinking about the employees and assume that if they would have a provision to recover for 27 weeks, they are going to use all 27 weeks to recover, even if they're good to go back to work after 20 weeks.

I disagree.

* (16:40)

If we think this way, we are basically questioning the integrity of our fellow Manitobans. We all have employment benefits. And, you know, we use it. With exceptions, I don't think everybody abuses it.

If you're allowed to get a set of glasses every two years, there are many, many people that I know that don't get a new pair of glasses every two years because they're eligible for it. I don't think that's the case. So I think we should basically respect our workers.

If this bill does something positive for the working community, for the labour class, it makes them happy. It makes their families happy. It gives them safety to work better.

We talk about job satisfaction. So better job satisfaction means better retention. Every other day, we are talking about retention, we are talking about out-migration, we are talking about attracting more people to Manitoba. How would we do that? By improving the conditions where people work. By telling them, hey, come here; this is what we have to offer to you. We would attract more people.

And I think if a team of employees is happy at a particular business, business is going to thrive. And I think businesses actually would welcome such a step that we are taking.

And when we talk about consultations, well, there is a process. There's a process in place. And I'm so proud to say this, that we have a system in place where any Manitoban can participate in the process of this legislative process where we, you know, create new laws and discuss. At committee stage, we have seen opposition to so many bills. We have seen support to so many bills.

My experiences, I would quote this example about bill 64: 500-plus people stood up against that bill. And that bill was put forward by the previous PC government. What happened to the bill? Everybody knows what happened to the bill. It was repealed, was taken back. Why? Because Manitobans didn't want it. I would say it was a bad piece of legislation. If it was great, people would have welcomed that, right?

So there is a system in place. If people are not opposing it, people are wanting us to move forward on such legislation, then we should listen to the people, because we are here representing people. It's not the minister wanting to do this; it's the people the minister represents wanting to have these positive changes.

And I have heard comments like, unionization negatively impacts businesses. How? How? What unions do, they simply stand up for workers' rights. And we have great employers with unionized people working for them, and they are thriving. They're internationally known businesses. So I think we shouldn't assume such things; we shouldn't comment in this sacred Chamber like that.

And I was surprised to listen—the word abuse. Like, abusing these provisions. That's a strong word. Why would somebody abuse those provisions? Okay. We have a provision to attend this session virtually, right? How many people are attending virtually today? There is a provision; it could be used, it could be abused, because you are so lazy, don't want to get up, get ready and come to the Chamber and burn some fuel. Nobody is abusing it. So let's respect the workers, let's respect fellow Manitobans.

And when we are talking about abusing and wasting taxpayers' money, who are the taxpayers? Themselves, who you're accusing of abusing such provisions. I think we can do better.

And let's talk about immigration. We have a serious issue of out-migration because of bad policies that we have seen recently, few years, when this government, PC government, was in charge. And we have seen out-migration. So if we have better legislation—*[interjection]*

Okay. Should I continue, or should I address the heckling points?

So I think, you know, let's be responsible. We are lucky enough, we are privileged to sit in this Chamber. We have that opportunity to do something good for the people. Let's talk about what we, the 57 elected representatives here, can do together to stop that out-migration. Let's not blame those sitting far away from us.

I know that those policies do impact all provinces, but we cannot simply say that no, it's not our fault. Let's be responsible. Let's stand up for Manitobans. Let's stand up for the people who sent us here to do something good. That's what we're doing.

And I see this legislation and these changes as investment in this industry, across industries. We are making things better here, right? And happy employees create happy environment.

And if any employee, unfortunately, who gets sick and needs a long time to recover, and they are stressed about not having that provision to extend their leave, what would happen to the business?

Is it good to adjust your team for another two weeks and wait for that employee to get better and come back, or lose them? If we don't have such provisions, I think these employers would be losing good employees. I think this is a great, great strategy for retention.

And we know that we have a labour shortage. How do we attract labour? By better labour laws. That's what we are doing; that's what is on the agenda; that's what we have done historically; that's what we are doing right now. But we have seen resistance to let that happen.

I want to repeat what has been already said in the Chamber, but we all know that that's unfortunate. We need to work together, make things better for all Manitobans—all Manitobans—including workers.

So I think I would conclude here. Thank you so much, Honourable Speaker, for this opportunity to speak to Bill 9.

Thank you.

Mr. Obby Khan (Fort Whyte): It's an honour to always rise—Honourable Speaker, sorry, sorry. You guys switched seats, Honourable Speaker.

It's always an honour to rise and put some words on the record here. It's unfortunate that I only have about 11 minutes left—or, ten minutes left to put some

words on, but, you know, gratefully, the rules in this building allow me to come back and speak for another 20 minutes when this bill comes back, so there is good news on that front.

So, with 10 minutes only, I will condense some of my talking points. First of all I want to acknowledge the member from—sorry—the member for Burrows (Mr. Brar). He knows I have the utmost respect for him, and the comments that he makes in this House are definitely worthy of everyone to listen to. And I do take what he says to heart.

* (16:50)

When he says who wants these changes—or, the people want these changes. The people want these changes. Who are these people? When—just asked the minister, who did she consult with, and she said, I didn't consult with Canadian Federation of Independent Business, over 97,000 members. I didn't 'connult' with the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce. I didn't—the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) used to be involved with the Assiniboia Chamber of Commerce and she didn't address the Assiniboia Chamber of Commerce, Manitoba Chambers of Commerce and on and on.

What she did say was, I didn't have any time to meet with them. I didn't meet with AMM. So you didn't meet with any businesses, you didn't meet with AMM, CFIB, any of the chambers, but you did meet with the Labour Management Review Committee, and they do great work—I'm not slighting them at all—and they made a recommendation, a non-binding recommendation to the minister.

And the minister says, we got to run with it. There hasn't been any consult done. So to the member for Burrows, again, with the utmost respect, I agree. But who says they want these changes?

The minister has not met with any businesses; any businesses. She's met with one committee; the member from Fort Rouge wants to bring it up. But yes, she met with one committee, and this is going to affect all of Manitoba that this minister wants to bring this act forward.

The previous government is looking into it. Yes, the previous government didn't bring it forward because there was probably more consultation that was needed. Just because there was a review doesn't mean you act on it right away; you have to follow up with sound decisions.

And it's clear that this government does not have the ability to make sound decisions. It's clear that this government is only forcing whatever ideology they want through. This does not make sense to put this through without consultation.

Now, to be clear, to be clear because I can see the Minister of Agriculture—or, Environment, sorry—I'm ready to say something, I'm not saying that we don't need to go to 27 weeks. That is not what we're saying.

If someone is on serious sick leave and it's documented and the proper medical attention is there, and it is—there's a list and there's requirements and consultations to be done; there's been thorough thought brought forward to this bill. I'm open to that conversation and say, yes, maybe we need to look at that because there are serious conditions, whether it be cancer—my mother, she had a—well, a rough, I don't know if she likes me to share—a liver transplant, and she was off for a very, very long time with the liver transplant. That is something very serious.

You know, it's unfortunate the minister of Immigration doesn't want to listen to the comments that are being made right now. The minister—no, and you have the member from East St. Paul—River East, Kildonan, sorry—River East Kildonan, who wants to quote the rules in the House and yet she has no idea what the rules are.

My comments were simply, the minister of Immigration does not want to listen. It was not commenting on anything else other than the minister of Immigration does not want to listen and this member wants to heckle me and shout me down because this is exactly what the NDP want.

What they want is they don't want facts on the record. Yes. And they don't want facts on the record and the facts are simple: this minister didn't meet with anyone. This minister is forcing this through on the review of a management committee.

This minister, when asked which other provinces are doing this, this minister herself said, I think Quebec and Ontario. Well, Ontario is not actually doing it. Quebec was the only one that's doing this, and Quebec, as we all know, operates a little bit differently than the rest of Canada and they are the only ones that do that.

But we are the only province that wants to move this type of jurisdiction forward. New Brunswick has been under consultation for years for this, years they've been consulted. This minister? Six months, they want to push this bill forward. Alberta, how long do they give?

Sixteen weeks, currently, right now. We currently give 17 weeks in this province. Alberta does 16.

Well, let's look at apples to apples because comparing Manitoba to Quebec or Alberta might not be a fair comparison, so let's look at Saskatchewan. What does Saskatchewan do currently right now? Twelve. We do 17. We are one of the highest provinces in Canada to give sick leave right now, and this minister wants to up it by another 10 weeks without consultation.

The conversation is, there hasn't been proper consultation. Not the validity of the argument of going from 17 to 27. The conversation is that we have not had consultation. This minister just wants to get it done and can't offer any rhyme or reason.

When offered—when asked, how much it's going to cost businesses in the province of Manitoba, the minister cannot offer an answer. Well, that should be a pretty simple answer, Honourable Speaker. You will look at how many businesses are roughly affected by this. You would then take that and compare that to the federal numbers and you'd run a percentage. It's not rocket science. It's really not.

If you wondered how many people are going to be affected by this, look at the federal landscape, see how much of an increase they've had, bring that to Manitoba, run it on a percentage basis, and you will be able to come with a number, and the minister could not provide that number.

Manitobans should be very concerned with this, that this minister of Immigration is trying to just force through an amendment to an act that affects 90 per cent of businesses here in Manitoba; 90 per cent of them are employed—of employees in Manitoba are employed through the 'employment' standard act—Employment Standards Code, sorry.

Minister, you would think when there is something of this significance that is going to affect this many people and this many businesses, that you would have taken the time to consult with them. It blows my mind that, when the question was asked, who did you consult with—and that's a long-ball question, because you always ask that when you ask bills—who did you consult with? You want go somewhere, who did you consult, you want to buy something, who did you consult with? What review did you look at? Who did you talk to?

And this minister could not offer any of those answers. It's concerning. Manitobans need to be concerned. Stable and consistent employment is critical

for Manitobans to provide themselves and their families. Again, the argument is not whether to go to 17 to 27; the simple conversation is, who did you consult with, what are the costs going to be, who's asking for this? Simple questions that should come forward before any bill goes forward, and this minister could not answer those questions.

We want all Manitobans to feel supported, and their jobs are protected. Jobs they love, jobs they love walking into, jobs where they are respected and valued like we all are inside this Chamber. Every day you walk in here, you—we feel nothing but respect and value. No one in the House can disagree with that, I think. I think all my colleagues feel very much loved and respected in here.

However, we find ourselves in the time of uncertainty, Honourable Speaker, a time of flux, a time of change, where the business landscape, the work landscape is changing. Things that are happening today didn't happen five years ago, 10 years ago, 20 years ago. So is there need to update? Yes. But is there need to just blindly update something because the federal government—or the feds have done this? No.

We are the only province—this minister is the only one asking for this. From listening to her comments, doesn't sound like anyone else wants this other than a review committee. Didn't meet with any businesses, asked—I mean, the minister did allude to meeting with the union members, so I'm sure they met with unions, because we all know where the NDP and unions stand: hand in hand together. Maybe they'd—either they—hand in one pocket or the other pocket, who knows what's going on there?

But it is clear from the appointments that this government has made, from the decisions that they're making, from the bill that was simply leaked yesterday to the media by this minister of Immigration, that the unions are working hand in hand with the NDP.

It is clear as day; the minister leaked that information yesterday. A matter of privilege was called in here—I don't know if the members opposite were aware of this, but there was a matter of privilege brought up yesterday, a very serious matter—where the—it was

obvious that this minister of Immigration and this Premier (Mr. Kinew) had given a copy or had given information to the unions.

Unions are great, unions serve a purpose in this province. Of course they do, we're not saying that. Just like we're not saying it shouldn't go from 17 to 27. We're saying that there needs to be conversation with all stakeholders at the table.

They want to make a decision one-sided. We're saying, make the decision with everyone at the table. Bring everyone together so we can have that conversation, so that they can all feel valued and respected, just like we do on this—in this Chamber here, even when members opposite heckle me, I know I feel valued and respected here.

In this time of uncertainty, we have to look how we're going to move forward. These are important when you want to amend an act as serious as this. Key facts that this province—on this Province's own website, that there will be labour shortage—and this is from the minister's own website, the government's own website; maybe it might be good for them to listen up here—that there will be a labour shortage over the next five years. Significant mismatches between workers and available jobs will likely lead to significant shortages in specific occupations. Significant shortages of workers are expected for those with no post-secondary training, education, business, management, marketing and related support services, health professions and related programs.

Many occupations are expected to face labour shortages over the next five years. This is a concerning stat on this own government's website that they need to be aware of. That, on average, the supply of workers is expected to exceed by demand—

The Speaker: Order, please.

When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member will have 20 minutes remaining.

The hour being 5 o'clock, the House is now adjourned—my mistake—the honourable member has 19 minutes remaining—the hour now being 5 o'clock, the House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

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